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"'Don't read the name at the end,' she warned, 'you know him.'"

(See page 157)

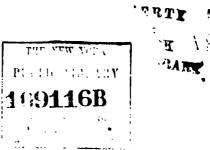
JACONETTA STORIES

BY
FANNIE HEASLIP LEA
AUTHOR OF "QUICKSANDA"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY WILL FOSTER

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NOTE

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F. H. L.

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From drawings by Will Foster

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I JACONETTA AND THE CYNIC

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JACONETTA STORIES

I

JACONETTA AND THE CYNIC

HE Cynic was a man who once asked Jaconetta to marry him.

You will please not infer from this that Jaconetta was in any way responsible for his cynicism. On the contrary she had labelled the man in the hope of shaming it out of him. His real name was Gardner Stanford and his enemies said he had been born in the Middle West. Jaconetta was herself a Southerner. Her grandfather had been a major under Lee, and she had not an r in her vocabulary — but we digress.

As has been said, the Cynic asked Jaconetta to marry him, and when he had done it—entirely too well for great emotion—Jaconetta laughed.

JACONETTA STORIES

"Environment," she observed, "is half of decision."

It was so different a thing to say from what his question had required of her that the Cynic only stared.

"Don't you see what I'm thinking about?" cried Jaconetta impatiently. "I'll answer your question in a minute. Don't you follow me?"

"To the ends of the earth," said the Cynic drily. "Via what route?"

Jaconetta shrugged her shoulders as though he could see in the dark.

"What sort of a scene is this?" she demanded.

"Technically," he responded, falling in with her humour—"drop-curtain of garden and trees, with lighted windows of large house in middle distance—sky full of clouds, commonly known as scudding—sea in foreground, dark and angry-looking—squall coming up in southwest—banks of heavy cloud and a good deal of distant lightning—thunder, also distant, at long intervals—"

"That will do," said Jaconetta; "thank

you. Nothing like a ballroom or a conservatory — eh?"

"Not in the least," returned the Cynic, with a great deal of commendable self-restraint. "What are you driving at?"

"Nothing," said Jaconetta. "Relatively nothing, that is. I was only wondering why you chose an environment like this to—you know—"

The Cynic stared again.

"Yes, I know. Well - why not?"

"Because," said Jaconetta, "because in a ballroom—or a conservatory—or even out of doors, with a clear moon, I should probably see things differently. As it is, I've got to be honest. Everything seems so big and strong and dark, out here." She broke off with an evident striving for frivolity. "I cannot tell a lie."

"Oh, I see," said the Cynic rather disgustedly. "Aren't you making a lot of unnecessary fuss about it? Just say, 'My good man, I can't marry you, because I don't love you!' That's all there is to it. Moreover, it's no more than I expected."

Jaconetta tilted her head on one side and looked at him strangely. A mockery that was not wholly mirthful informed her glance.

"Then why did you ask me?" she demanded.

"I don't know," said the Cynic frankly.

"Partly because I dislike uncertainty—
partly because a thing like that says itself—
partly because you look unusually desirable in that white gown. The fact remains that when I asked you I knew what you were going to say. You don't love me."

Jaconetta clasped both hands about her knees and looked out across the water. There are more things in Heaven and earth than were dreamt of in Horatio's philosophy, and some of those things, it may be, Jaconetta saw. In any case a sigh escaped her, very softly.

"About that," she said presently, "I am going to say nothing at all." She laughed. "My good man," she echoed obediently, "I can't marry you, because "— the poise of the head and the tone of her voice defied him —" because you don't love me."

"Well, upon my word!" said the Cynic. "Just that," said Jaconetta stubbornly.

The Cynic broke off a long blade of grass and caught the end of it between his teeth.

"Then why should I ask you to marry me?" he suggested quietly.

"Well not for my wealth, I'll admit," said Jaconetta with a graceless little laugh. "There's nothing plethoric about my bank-account. Not for my position — eh? True you're only a humble Yankee — but you're also a Socialist. Not for my maddening beauty, I dare say. Why did you do it?" asked Jaconetta, queerly eager, all of a sudden.

The Cynic worried his blade of grass in silence.

"Why?" repeated Jaconetta, a bit wistful.

"What do you want re to say?" he inquired. "You deny the obvious reason. You're not like any other woman to me. You mean something to me no other woman means. I call it love — you don't. All I know is, you're different from the rest."

"How am I different?" asked Jaconetta coolly. She leaned toward him, elbows on her knees and a flash of lightning showed her small dark face, intent and questioning. Taconetta's face is not beautiful. It is not even pretty. Her eyes are too big and her dimples too deep, her hair too heavy and her nose too impudent, for mere beauty. she tips up her pointed chin and narrows her eyes to two mocking slits of shadow she is dangerous - but not beautiful. Men have been known to find her lovely - but no two of those men could ever describe her alike, which somewhat invalidates their testimony. Also, a disappointed suitor once said of Jaconetta that if beauty was deceitful and favour was vain she had that much at least in common with those pleasing attributes, but he was not a good loser, that suitor, and we shall not hear of him again.

Just as there are other ways of killing a cat than by kindness, so there are other ways of subjugating man, than by beauty. Jaconetta had never needed it.

Now, however, she required an elucida-

tion of the difference and reluctantly the Cynic attempted it.

"I am more at home with you than with other women," he said slowly. "We understand each other. We don't always arrive at the same conclusions but our methods of thinking are the same. There's something of the gypsy in you that I like. You're a good comrade. You know when to forgive and when not. You are just in your ideas of men. You're unconventional enough to appreciate my theories — what?"

"Oh, Man!" said Jaconetta. "Oh, outspoken, unvarnished Man!"

"What d'you mean?" demanded the Cynic with a trifle of irritability. Being an inborn egotist he can never quite rid himself of the suspicion that Jaconetta is laughing at him — as nine times out of ten she is. She laughs a great deal, by and large, does Jaconetta. Her red mouth twists easily into mirth, which has, however, like Fahrenheit, its varying degrees.

"Go on," she commanded. "Is that all?"

The Cynic shrugged.

"That's all," he said curtly, "except that
— well, except that I feel at home with you.
I feel rested and at ease — wings folded,
muscles relaxed, and all that. I feel as if
I'd like to come back to you every evening
out of the world of men and lay my work
in your lap for you to praise or blame."

His voice dropped deep and quiet, and in the darkness, Jaconetta's hand went trembling to her throat with the gesture of one who chokes. "I feel as if I could work well, knowing that afterward — there would be you. It isn't a flame nor a whirlwind nor any of the things you read about, but it's what no other woman has meant to me — and it's why I asked you to marry me."

"Is that all?" asked Jaconetta steadily.

"All?" said the Cynic. "Yes; apparently it's not enough, but — that's all."

"It's a good deal," said Jaconetta, "but you don't love me. Need we talk about it any more?"

"Yes," said the Cynic, "we need." After which, as the lady novelists say in a

great many of their eminently respectable books, a silence fell.

It was obviously not an empty silence, although Jaconetta still sat, hands clasped about her knees, staring out into the dark, and the Cynic still tortured his blade of grass. If she had suddenly sobbed aloud, which thanks to her sense of humour she would never have done, her unhappiness could not have voiced itself clearer; and as for him—a tail to swish and long ears to flap could not have proclaimed him a stubborner mule. The lightning flashed four times and thunder echoed, grumbling across the heavens just as often in that queer, strained pause. Then the Cynic spoke.

"What is it you want? Emotionalism? Sentimentality? I'm not a kid. Of course I've made a fool of myself over girls, in the early stages — kept stringy curls, and pictures — trembled if the divinity's hand touched mine — all that sort of thing. I thought you wise enough to know that for what it is worth; a phase of growth expending itself on

any chance object with which it comes in contact. What I offer you is material as well as spiritual. It may be less scenic, but it's more real."

- "Is it?" asked Jaconetta politely.
- "Of course it is," said the Cynic. Then he stopped short and peered at Jaconetta not without a suspicion of displeasure.
- "I never knew you to be sentimental, Jack."
 - "No," said Jaconetta, "I reckon not."
 - "Nor mushy."
 - "Allah forbid!" she agreed piously.
- "Then what in the name of the nine gods are you driving at?" he demanded savagely. Iaconetta laughed.
- "Dear me! dear me!" she said, "must I put it into words of one syllable for you, Stan?"
 - "I'm afraid you must," said the Cynic.
- "Very well, then," said Jaconetta. "Allons, enfants de la patrie! Lend me your ears so to speak. You-do-not-love-me!"
 - "Who's the best judge of that?"

JACONETTA AND THE CYNIC

"I," said Jaconetta simply, "because I know the most about the subject in hand—eh?"

The Cynic did not contradict her.

"I've been loving somebody or other—more or less—ever since I can remember," said Jaconetta. "And more or less, ever since I can remember, somebody or other has been loving me. I know the untender passion when I see it, dear boy, believe me; I can recognise the symptoms coming and going. You haven't got them—"

"No?" said the Cynic. He added after a fleeting pause, "What d'you want me to do? Tear my hair? Go down on my knees? Shed tears? Talk poetry?"

"Talk sense," said Jaconetta sweetly, and when you want to fool me, Stan, pick out a game I can't play."

"You think it's a game?" asked the Cynic. His eyes narrowed resentfully.

"I'd hate to think it was anything else," said Jaconetta, "because — you do it so badly."

Whereupon ensued another pause,

fraught with hostilities. This time Jaconetta broke it.

"I don't really want to marry anybody," she reasoned calmly — "just yet. I'm quite comfy as I am. Father and I are a sufficiently happy family for ordinary purposes; and for extraordinary purposes, there is —"

"The Bread-Line," supplied the Cynic rather curtly.

By which name he referred to the succession of suitors who stand at Jaconetta's gate and accept the crumbs that fall from her table.

- "Exactly," said Jaconetta. "The Bread-Line — God bless it!"
- "Does it ever occur to you," suggested the Cynic, "that you can't keep the Bread-Line forever on the fence?"

Jaconetta chuckled irresistibly.

"You're mixing metaphors, dear boy—"
"In five years—or ten," he insisted,
"you'll be past all that. You've got to get
too old for it whether you will or not.
You'll come inevitably to the place where
you can't play the game, as you call it, with-

out making yourself ridiculous. Coquetry's all right in a girl—it makes an old maid look a silly ass."

- "Shall I be an old maid," asked Jaconetta humbly, "unless I marry you, Stan?"
- "Most likely," said the Cynic with reluctant humour.
- "I might marry George Hennen," said Jaconetta.
 - "Has he asked you?"
- "Every Sunday afternoon for the past three years."
- "Commendable persistence. He'd bore you to death."
- "So I told him," said Jaconetta airily. "However, there remains Doctor Crane —"
- "A rotten cad," said the Cynic with great frankness.
- "But frightfully amusing," said Jaconetta, "and Timmie Blaine."

The Cynic emitted a sound somewhere between a sniff and a snort.

- "You like Brent Stanton," said Jaconetta musingly.
 - "Not for matrimonial purposes unless

you want to spend your life listening to his funny stories."

"Then there is," said Jaconetta, "nobody you'd advise me to consider eh?"

"I have asked you," replied the Cynic with some dignity, "to marry me. You don't seem to take me quite seriously."

"I was trying to turn it off," said Jaconetta bravely.

"Suppose we come down to cases—"

The squall in the southwest was gathering fast.

"I think there'll be a storm," said Jaconetta.

"Probably will," said the Cynic. "Do you still think —"

Jaconetta turned on him suddenly.

"I still say you don't love me," she interrupted. "What you say you feel for me is all very fine — but it isn't caring. And the man I marry must care — more than that."

"Oh, he must?"

"Yes," said Jaconetta, not quite so steadily

as before, "because I shall care more than that, myself. An armchair may mean rest to you," she added, a little scornfully. "I want to mean more than an armchair — or nothing. You see, I'm quite honest about it. That's best — don't you think?" Her restless hand twined about a stem of grass and clung there tightly in the shielding dark.

"I don't know what you want," said the Cynic impatiently.

"That," said Jaconetta, "is why I won't marry you. You never would know what I wanted. You'd be perfectly satisfied to get what you wanted, and take a chance on the rest. I've seen too many marriages like that—with one of the two going hungry for what the other didn't know how to give. It's good to know that you're fond of me—that I rest you—that you like to bring me your woes and things—but, Stan, you can do all that without marrying me—eh? What's the use of tying ourselves together when we're just good friends. You'd be sure to bump into me—I'd jostle you. Two people can't walk so close together in

the straight and narrow path — comfortably — unless they love each other."

"If what I offer you is not love," said the Cynic coldly, "what is it?"

"I wonder!" said Jaconetta. Her flippancy was wholly without mirth. "Ask me something easy, Stan. How do I know the names of all the little loves? Call it loneliness—if you like." Suddenly she put both hands to her eyes with a gesture of utter weariness. "You don't love me," she said. "I know it—and I think you know it. I feel so sure of it that I will even make a bargain with you. If, in your soul, you believe you love me—love, mind you; not liking, nor affection, nor anything else but love—you may say what you like to me, and I will listen.—Well?"

The Cynic put out his hand—once. Twice he opened his mouth to speak. Ultimately, for he was, according to his lights, an honest Cynic, he said:

[&]quot;I don't know what you'd call it."

[&]quot;You see?" said Iaconetta.

[&]quot;You're a cold little thing," said the

Cynic. He came and stood beside her, one hand deep in his pocket, the other thrusting back his hair, and, like hers, the flippancy of his words covered a multitude of other things.

"Am I?" said Jaconetta curiously. "I made a condition for you—could you fill it?" She turned from him, rising, and set her feet toward the lighted house. "After all," she said, over her shoulder, "I never answered your question, did I? You asked me if I cared."

"I think an answer would be superfluous," said the Cynic grimly.

"It would," said Jaconetta, "since you must have seen that I do."

"You!" said the Cynic. He very nearly laughed.

Jaconetta stopped with one foot on the step of the lighted house and looked back to the sea.

"Of course I care," she said, in a queer, tired little drawl. "How else should I have known that you didn't?"

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II JACONETTA AND THE MEMORIES

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JACONETTA AND THE MEMORIES

IT happened that the Cynic came suddenly upon Jaconetta one evening when her lap and a portion of the hearth-rug upon which she sat, Turk-fashion, were white with letters, old letters, some half-opened and some — but these lay in the grate — half-charred.

"Hello!" he said cheerfully, pausing in the doorway to reconnoitre. "Having a holocaust?"

Jaconetta looked up with a little startled scowl that did not smooth itself out at once.

"How did you get in?" she inquired, anything but politely. "I told Mary I was not at home."

"So Mary told me," admitted the Cynic, unmoved. "I said then I'd come in and have a smoke with your father."

"Father!" Jaconetta scrambled halfway to her feet with a protective clutch on the letters, but she sank back before the Cynic's soothing gesture.

"That's all right," he said gently. "Go on with the wake. When I got to the door I said, 'Ah, Mary, I see Miss Jaconetta is in, after all. You needn't bother—' So here I am." He waived conclusions with a genial smile, and selecting a large leather chair on the opposite side of the fireplace, sank into it with a sigh of content, and reached for his cigarette case.

Jaconetta returned to the contemplation of the letters in an abstraction that apparently left no room for conversation.

- "Sick?" asked the Cynic pleasantly, from behind a drift of blue smoke.
 - "H'm?" said Jaconetta, not looking up.
- "I've noticed," he went on impersonally, that when a woman becomes reminiscent she is either sick or contemplating a new victim."
- "Sometimes," said Jaconetta impishly, there is another reason. Girls read over

their old letters, and burn them, you know, when they are — going to be married."

"Yes?" assented the Cynic; "yes." His cigarette burned to an incredibly long ash between heedless fingers. It is a cherished delusion of his that if Jaconetta will not marry him, at least she will marry no one else.

"Yes!" he repeated with a new inflection. Jaconetta rested her cheek on the little brown fingers of her left hand and looked at the fire with pensive tenderness. The hand was ringless.

"However," she announced at length, "I am neither sick, 'contemplating a new victim,' nor going to be married. I am blue — unhappy — desolate." She leaned her chin on both hands and stared hard before her. "So I got out my box of letters and began to read them. It cheers me up," she added hopefully, "to see how many people have loved me. It seems to argue that I must be a very decent sort after all, eh?"

The Cynic shrugged his shoulders with a smile that was both inscrutable and adaptable.

It might have meant anything, from ardent devotion to a disinterested consideration of circumstances. "Pretty decent," he added, by way of parenthesis.

Presently Jaconetta looked up from the earnest perusal of a voluminous epistle, closely written in a small, masculine hand.

- "Every man is a poet in his first loveletters," she said sententiously. "Listen to this—"
 - "See here —" began the Cynic.
 - "I'm not going to tell you who it is --"
 - "I don't want --"
- "Don't be absurd," said Jaconetta coldly.

 "Do you think I'd do it if it weren't right?"

 She read slowly and with a total lack of emphasis:

"There is nothing I would not dare for you; nothing I could not be, that you wanted me; nothing I would not give up, nothing I would not change, at your wish, except—"

"That's enough!" cried the Cynic suddenly. "What sort of a soul have you got, anyhow? Don't read me that stuff. Is it nothing but black and white to you?" He broke off in real indignation.

Jaconetta selected another sheet from the loose heap in her lap.

"I hope I know when to forget," she said serenely. "Calm yourself! He's been married for two years, and he adores the very buckles on his wife's slippers. What? No, he wasn't flirting with me when he wrote that; he meant it—at the time. Now listen to this—" she read on hastily, before the Cynic could stop her:

"You are the only girl in the world, so far as I am concerned. The rest of them will do for the general run of wives and mothers and sweethearts to humanity; but you are different. You are the reason for everything I shall ever want."

"Ugh!" said Jaconetta unexpectedly. "That was a heavy responsibility, wasn't it?"

"You are impossible," said the Cynic slowly.

"Eh?" said Jaconetta, honestly startled.
"Oh! Because I'm reading this? That's

all right. They're all old stories now dead pasts - mummied loves - and all the rest of it. This last one -" she folded the sheet and patted it back into its envelope — "I had a letter from him a month or so ago. He's going to marry a girl in Texas, and he writes of her with exactly the same enthusiasm. What's a little enthusiasm. after all, that one should grudge it to life? One has only a handful of years, at best, and if one doesn't sayour all there is in the phases that come with those years, why --" She broke off, looking curiously at a sprig of something, withered and dry, that had fallen from the envelope she held, into her open "Why —" she said again, aimlessly, the thread of her speech lost in a new tangle of thought. "Why --"

The Cynic laughed noiselessly, then he leaned forward with a charmingly confidential air.

"What is it?" he demanded. "Another dead past? What's the little vegetable for?"

Jaconetta lifted quick eyes and laughed.

Then she went back to staring at the thing in her hand.

"Are you thinking whether you shall keep it or burn it?" he teased.

"No. Oh, no; I am wondering, on the contrary," said Jaconetta calmly, "why I ever kept it, and who gave it to me."

She regarded it with a reflective air, and lifted it suddenly to the central feature of her small, dark face.

"Heliotrope," she announced, between sniffs. "Heavens! it's dry!" She groped in the lacy recesses of her sleeve with her free hand, and a pained expression contorted her face.

"I think I'm going to sneeze," she faltered. The Cynic produced a handkerchief and dropped it in her lap. Jaconetta buried her face in its folds, and agonised a moment in silence, to no avail.

Presently she gave him back the handkerchief. "It must have been merely emotion," she explained thoughtfully, "but I was sure it was a sneeze." She held the withered bit of heliotrope at a safe distance and regarded it resentfully.

Jaconetta has a face that slanderously reveals her lightest thought. Above the heliotrope it wavered from resentment to uncertainty, from uncertainty to resolution, and from resolution to a very definite amusement. Finally she laughed — chuckled rather — in an adorable fashion of her own. The Cynic watched her meantime, through half-closed eyes, and his cigarette went out, forgotten.

"What vampires you women are!" he said suddenly.

"Eh?" Jaconetta was plainly astonished.

"Yes," insisted the Cynic; "vampires, parasites — every one of you!" He leaned forward, elbows on his knees, and brought the clenched fist of his left hand down into the palm of his right. "There you sit, laughing over the dry husk of a man's love — giggling in the face of a corpse — preening your vanity above a strangled illusion! What's truth to you? or faith? or passion? or love? The trinket of a day — something to wear in your

hair like a flower, and throw away when you tire of it - something to foster your vanity and prop up your self-esteem. Why, your memory's a rag-bag of loves and lovers. You pull out a scrap, but you can't even remember whose cloth it was cut from. A man lives in your remembrance, not for what he was or was not, but because he loved you. It is his claim to distinction. Have you nothing more real than that in your life? Doesn't that bit of a dead flower, there, hurt you for even a second? Hasn't it a voice for some dead moment? Why, you should be sorry — or glad — for the memory it awakens — anything —only feel! Heaven's sake, feel! You might have sawdust in your veins! What?" He broke off in an irritation not lessened by Jaconetta's mocking eyes.

"Go on!" she said, with a gamin grimace.
"You're doing fine!"

"That's all very well," he retorted. "I'm glad I amuse you; but, on my word, I think the man who loves and rides away is the only sane one in the human species.

You're not worth a man's faith and trust and manhood. You're vampires — vampires, all of you! You batten on our illusions, our youthful beliefs, our credulity, and then — you smile over the words we wrote in the clutch of our agony — laugh at the crude expression of the only love that is ever real in any man — his first — and sniff delicately at the dust of the flowers you wore for us. 'Whose was it? Why did I keep it? What did it stand for?'"

Jaconetta's eyes softened to an appeal.

"If I could remember who gave it to me," she offered hopefully, "I'm sure I should know why I kept it, and what it was for. But you see—"

"I quite see," he interrupted ruthlessly.

"There have been so many—"

"One gets them confused," said Jaconetta eagerly, "and then, there's no clue. It's just a bit of dead heliotrope in a plain envelope. Heliotrope's a silly, sentimental sort of flower, so it must have had some significance; and one doesn't get it in hothouse bouquets, so it must have been an in-

timate gift. But then again so many men are sentimental—"

"And intimate?" suggested the Cynic, with caustic brevity.

"If you like," she conceded. "At least, you are easy to know." She drew her dark brows into a puzzled frown and sighed deeply. "I wish I could remember—he may have been interesting."

"He must have been," scoffed the Cynic, since you forgot him."

"Aha!" cried Jaconetta suddenly.

"Then you think forgetfulness is not easy?"

She clasped both hands about her knees, and the letters slipped and slid unheeded from her lap to the floor, as she lifted questioning eyes for the Cynic's answer.

It did not come at once. The Cynic's shrug was a tacit admission of disbelief and uncertainty.

"God knows!" he said sombrely, at last.

"Do you forget the white stones that mark your life? Do you remember the every-day pebbles? What do you mean by forgetfulness? Oblivion? Or temporary relief?

A woman forgets sooner than a man, I think."

"So?" murmured Jaconetta courteously; then her mockery shrivelled in a flame of "It's good that we do," she cried protest. "If women were not adjustable bitterly. and adaptable - if they were not weak and uncertain, and sometimes, thank Heaven, forgetful — there would be nothing left of them for punishment in the next world - each of them would have her own little self-lighting, self-heating Inferno right here on earth." She thrust the dark hair out of her eyes with an impatient gesture, and drew a long breath. "I think," she finished with whimsical deliberation, banking the fires of her feeling, "the Powers That Be send women into the world weakened, mentally and spiritually, to their uses, and it is through that weakness that they endure."

Her words died in a shadowy silence. The Cynic lit another cigarette and flung it into the fire half smoked.

"I'm going," he said suddenly, and got to his feet with a restless suggestion of haste. "You might, at least, leave me my belief in one woman's squareness and reality."

"Meaning me?" asked Jaconetta, with a slow smile.

"Meaning you," he retorted grimly. "It hurts my understanding of you to have you show the shallow flippancies of the common or garden flirt. That wretched little vegetable, now — throw it away if you like, but don't laugh at it. It must have been a part of your life — and life's nothing to laugh at."

"Indeed, no!" Jaconetta assented indifferently. "In my experience, life's a story with the joke on you."

She waited until he had taken her hand, perfunctorily, released it, and crossed the room to the door, then she spoke in her softest voice.

"I'm glad to know your views on the subject," she murmured sweetly, "because, as a matter of fact, I remembered all along. You gave it to me yourself, the night of the Harrison's dance — last year — eh?"

"Damn," said the Cynic. As he used

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the word, it was less an exclamation than a foot-note.

"Quite so," said Jaconetta.

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When the Cynic had gone she kissed the little vegetable and flung it into the fire.

III JACONETTA AND THE CELEBRITY



III

JACONETTA AND THE CELEBRITY

CROSS the little table, with its one opal-shaded candle and its trickery of glass and silver, Jaconetta looked blithely into her companion's eyes, her own provocative beneath the quaintly drooping brim of a large black hat. There was a mirror just behind his head — there are mirrors behind every one's head in that especial restaurant — and this may have accounted somewhat for the unusual amount of attention he was receiving. Jaconetta rather en-· joyed the shaded reflection of her own sad eyes, her little pointed chin, her one dimple and the pretty slender neck rising from the round lace collar of her simple frock. made a little face at herself, adjusting her hat by a faint movement of the eyebrows as every woman knows how to do, and spared another glance for the man.

"I like celebrities," she resumed idly, going back by a kind of mental gymnastics to the theme of their last retouching. "They're so apt to be unexpected. The musicians are stolid, and the writers play baseball. You can always depend upon them to do the thing you wouldn't think they would."

"In which case," he retorted, "the thing you-wouldn't-think-they-would becomes the commonplace — then where's your argument? Did you ever meet a writer who —"

"Lots of them," interrupted Jaconetta, with a rudeness delightfully frank. "They're all alike — that is, some of them are. Did I ever tell you about my Celebrity?"

The Cynic smiled pleasantly at her reminiscent question. "I've heard you apply the possessive pronoun to a good many species — I don't remember just now —"

"Then I couldn't have told you," Jaconetta decided at once, "because he was frightfully interesting — quite the most interesting man —"

- "Of his moment?"
- "I should have said that," she reproved coldly, "if you had given me time. Do you want to hear about him?"
- "Why ask?" murmured the Cynic resignedly; "you'd tell me anyhow. I can listen. I've had a liberal education in that. Go on it begins 'there was a man in (any old place) this summer—'"

The waiter, approaching with the suavity peculiar to waiters and diplomats, set a covered silver dish between the two.

- "Serve it," ordered the Cynic briefly, and when the duck had been apportioned, "go on, Jack—'there was a man—'"
- "Not at all," said Jaconetta, selecting a fork. "It begins quite otherwise. You know I was a month in the East this year August it was, wasn't it? I went up to New York, and from there out to a country place on one of the lakes it doesn't matter where the point is that while I was at this country place I met —"
 - "A man what did I say?"
 - "Just as you usually do, the wrong thing,"

she retorted unkindly. "I was about to remark, when you so rudely interrupted me, that I met a woman."

"Merely the serpent preceding Adam into the garden."

Jaconetta shrugged and smiled.

- "A very charming woman, thirty-five or so (you really can't tell with hair so cheap), who took rather a fancy to me — you look politely incredulous."
- "It doesn't seem to me to need any footnotes."
- "She did, really, though, and she had a fad for motoring at the same time."
 - "She combined the two?"
- "We went beautifully together," said Jaconetta gravely. "I almost acquired the strained expression of an Idle Rich—that's by the way, though—I'm coming to the Celebrity. We motored out to the Country Club, the second time I met her, one afternoon, you know, and it was there—"

She stopped short, her eyes on the Cynic's inscrutable face where a smile flickered above a curious look of understanding.

"Well," she said resignedly, "what is it? Have I said anything really appalling? What are you thinking?"

"Nothing in the least appalling," he answered slowly. "As for what I'm thinking — that doesn't make a great deal of difference, does it?"

"It might amuse me to know."

"Help yourself, then," said the Cynic with the frankness of long acquaintance. "I was merely reflecting that all's grist that comes to your mill—celebrities, foot-ball players, clowns, kings and cabbages. Other women collect bangles. Your hobby is emotions, isn't it? What a fool a man would be—"

"To take me seriously?" she interposed with a swift little upward look.

"To take himself seriously, regarding you."

"Oh!" said Jaconetta gravely, "I think I catch your drift. Well, a fool, after all, has his paradise — that's something — in this vale of tears. I've assisted at the erecting of rather a few of those paradises in my time.

It gives me quite a comforted feeling to remember it! 'Something 'accomplished — something done,' you know!"

"I wonder," the Cynic went on carefully, why you persistently decline, then, to consider me—"

"As a fool in paradise?" Jaconetta reflected lightly. "No, Stan, you're the wise man out of it. It isn't my fault—that's you, you know. But we digress—wasn't I telling you an improving tale of—"

"You've told me a great many tales," the Cynic said coolly, "until I've about come to the conclusion that the truth isn't in you—nor a heart—nor a few other necessary things. I don't believe you're a woman at all. You've got your finger on your own pulse every second of the time. There isn't an emotion that gets by you—"

"Did you ask me out to dinner to tell me that?" Jaconetta demanded crossly, "because it's not my idea of an entertaining monologue."

"The truth seldom is," he answered grimly.

Jaconetta smiled at herself in the mirror, at some one she knew across the room, last of all at the Cynic on whom her eyes rested with a whimsical consideration.

"No?" she queried politely. "No? The truth isn't amusing? I wonder what you'd do if you met it face to face this minute. We don't speak the truth, as a rule—it isn't good for weak hearts. 'You nor I, nor nobody knows' what dreadful trouble it might make—but I do think it would be funny. Honestly, Stan, I think you underrate its amusing qualities. The truth is the funniest thing I know."

"And you know a great number of funny things?"

"Life's a merry jest to me," Jaconetta accepted gaily. "'Wherever I 'ave been, I've found it good.'" She smiled again, looking curiously down into the glass she held. "I like this water."

"Good enough," said the Cynic briefly.

"That's about the measure of your earnest.

You're equally divided between the virtues of a glass of carbonated water and the jest

of life. Haven't you any real feeling about anything, Jack? Are all your aches and joys and loves only skin deep? I wonder, sometimes—"

"Skin deep," Jaconetta assented promptly, "like beauty, poor thing! They're like beauty, too, in another respect. They're largely in the eye of the beholder."

"What do you mean?" he asked curiously.

"I don't suppose I mean anything," said Jaconetta carelessly, "or perhaps I did, but it's too much trouble to dig it out. What were we talking about, anyhow?"

"You can't, no one can, amount to much so long as she lives on the surface of things," the Cynic pursued with some determination. "So long as you persistently decline to consider the deeper issues, you can't expect any but shallow results."

"Like soft crabs," said Jaconetta sympathetically. She regarded the one on her plate with an approving eye. "You fish for those in shallow water, don't you? Well, I'm perfectly satisfied. I don't like wrecks,

nor devil-fish, nor drowned men — all those come out of the depths, eh?"

- "You're incorrigible," said the Cynic before he laughed.
- "I'm so glad you're pleased with me," Jaconetta replied meekly.
- "I'm not I'd like to see you a real woman with blood in her veins, instead of violet-water."

A humorous silence fell between them. There are many such silences between Jaconetta and the Cynic, when words are not so vivid as the understanding.

- "H'mph!" Jaconetta remarked at last. "That's very good of you. I can't tell you how I appreciate the interest you take in my emotional welfare. Some day, perhaps, I'll be able to repay it."
- "By doing as I ask?" The Cynic's voice was rather eager.
- "I can't imagine a more poetic justice," said Jaconetta flippantly, "but I think I'm strong enough to refrain from that. No, Stan, you're reasonably safe. I don't think—" She broke off and picked a leaf from

the violets at her belt, pulling it to pieces with fingers that shook imperceptibly.

"I was going to tell you about the Celebrity," she insisted airily. "Return to our sheep. (This is an unprofitable discussion, and how many times have I asked you not to start it?) I met him at the Country Club that afternoon."

"It isn't the first time I've proved the absence of anything approaching real feeling in you," the Cynic interrupted bitterly.

"Nor yet the last," said Jaconetta promptly. "I'm sorry I'm not intense enough; anyhow, as I was saying — I met him that afternoon in rather a funny way."

She went on determinedly in the face of the Cynic's uninterested silence.

"We were having tea on the veranda. I was telling a silly story about the indiscriminate sentimentality of Virginia men, and when I had finished they all laughed rather more than my wit warranted, so I turned—he was standing behind me, listening. Mrs. Forsyth had beckoned him, with her eyes, across the porch.

"She said, 'Jim' (he was James Alden, you know—'Men and Angels' and 'Fire of Spring' and all the rest), 'here's a little Southern girl you ought to know.' And he answered: 'I've been thinking that myself, the last five minutes,' so he pulled up a chair next to mine—"

"Emphasis on the possessive pronoun?" inquired the Cynic, thawing a little.

"Exactly," said Jaconetta. "You see the story had been rather funny, and nobody knew I had made up the point at the crucial moment. Their amusement inspired me. Anyhow, he liked it - and I liked him. He was a broad-shouldered man, with brown eyes that looked at you straight, and a quick, yet rather bored smile. He had a careless way of talking; short sentences tagged with 'd'ye see' and 'you know'an air of authority, and yet an air of being amused, because he was on the inside of things. You saw in the first five minutes that he was a big man, but in the next, you didn't care, because he was awfully human, just the same. Isn't it funny the difference it makes in a man when he's done something in the world?" She linked both hands before her, and presently shrugged away the question. "I saw quite a good deal of him after that."

"Alden?" asked Stanford, interested in spite of himself.

Jaconetta nodded. An expression of impish mockery came over her face. "Subsequent occurrences encouraged me in the belief that I was something of a hit that first evening. The dent I had made in his bright gold armour was easily large enough for the human hand."

Under the Cynic's disapproving look she lifted and held open reflectively five small fingers and a soft palm, regarding them with impartial satisfaction. "So I put mine in."

"I haven't the least doubt of it."

"Why should you have?" asked Jaconetta innocently wide-eyed. "Aren't I telling you? He sent flowers next morning, called in the afternoon and made up a theatreparty for me the night after. He knew how to be nice to a girl."

"Any man in love knows that," commented the Cynic bluntly.

"Oh, ho! Does he?" jeered Jaconetta. "I'll have some salad, Stan; I like the nut part of it. Does he, though? That's just where you're wrong. When a man's in love with a girl he's more than apt to think that being nice to her consists in sitting for hours in a shaded room and letting her tell him all about himself - no, I don't mean that kind of nice. My Celebrity had a vast experience, and the result of his deductions made up an interesting system. He knew enough to be bored and to stop just the right side of too numerous attentions. He never let me be really sure whether he amused me or I amused him. Did I say he was barely forty?"

"I had guessed it. No, you didn't say."

"It's nice to be clever, isn't it?" said Jaconetta sweetly. "Now, you never need an interlinear. Well, he was forty, and that was the only reason I didn't fall all the way in love with him. There can't be perfect

sympathy between two people at dinner when one is at the fish and the other just stirring his demi-tasse — can there?"

Stanford smiled reluctantly. He looked at Jaconetta out of retrospective, narrowed eyes and shook his head. "Go on," he said. "Didn't anything happen? You didn't fall in love — did he?"

"Did he?" she echoed with a little crow of shameless exultation. "I wonder! Anyhow, he gave an uncommonly good imitation of it. Every night for a month—and flowers every day or two. Mrs. Forsyth stopped caring for me with a sickening thud—you see, they were thought to be engaged. She seemed to resent—"

"Naturally —"

"Of course," Jaconetta agreed judicially. "I should have resented it myself, in her place. But her resentment didn't stop him. He came oftener yet. I couldn't be rude," she added plaintively.

She dipped into the frosted perfection of a chocolate parfait with fine discrimination, but a look in the Cynic's eyes, a curious dis-

secting sort of look, arrested the flow of her speech.

"Don't look at me like that," she said hastily. "I can feel myself turning into a curly white poodle with a pink bow on its neck; don't be silly, Stan, you know I don't mean more than one tenth of what I say. He was a Celebrity, you know, and I was flattered, just plain flattered, to have him like me. I began to think I must be an awfully clever creature."

"Wasted on your ordinary male acquaintances?" suggested the Cynic drily.

Jaconetta agreed with untactful frankness. "And he liked me—can't you see it?—just because I was young and inexperienced (compared with him, I mean) and different from the women he was used to. It pleased his artistic sense to consider me as an idyll, or something like that. He said I was so deliciously fresh."

"Too fresh by half," murmured the Cynic teasingly. "What punctured the balloon?"

"A very little thing," she mourned.
"Oh, he had built up a beautiful house of

cards for me! I almost believe he was in love with me — he almost believed it himself. We used to talk for hours and hours across the tea-table in my sitting-room. He said I had awakened all his old enthusiasms — and he believed in mine so firmly that I had to invent a lot to keep up with him. Did I tell you he sang?"

The Cynic made a sound of dissent.

"The most wonderful golden tenor you ever dreamed of!"

"'A tenor,'" quoted the Cynic without emotion, "'is not a man, but a disease.'"

"It was probably some squeaky baritone who said that," sniffed Jaconetta, settling her chin in cupped palms and staring out across the crowded room. "I tell you it would bring tears to your eyes to hear him sing Rodolpho's song from the last act of Boheme — you remember? And 'Donna é mobile'! — there was a laughing devil in that — Oh, and a lot of other little things — I used almost to weep over them — he could put that sob in his voice — you know. Have you heard 'Jes a-wearyin' for you'? —

I loved that. He used to sing for me hours at a time, some days, while I just curled up in a corner with cushions and listened."

"I see," said the Cynic. He said it with some displeasure.

"I wonder what you think you do see?" mused Jaconetta coolly. "Give me some water, please. Anyhow, one evening he had been singing for me in the dusk, over an hour I think it was, till the room was full of ghosts. I could shut my eyes and almost feel their fingers on my hair. There was a lamp on the table, but, beyond the little circle of light it threw, everything was indistinct, and a new moon made queer shaky shadows on the lawn, outside the window. There was a restless, breathing kind of wind in the trees. It was like that when he began to sing 'Jes a-wearyin' for you.'" She flung him an abrupt glance. "You said you'd never heard it?"

"Not that I know of."

"Well, you never want to," returned Jaconetta. "It's all the weariness, all the hungriness, all the aching, empty loneliness

in all the world put into a few soft words and notes. It's —"

"What do you know about loneliness?" asked Stanford with a curious resentment in his tone.

Jaconetta looked back at him, smiling her wistful, mocking smile. "I wonder!" she said calmly. "Anyhow, when he had finished, he left the piano and came over to my corner, and the light from the lamp must have reached my face, for he saw that my eyes were wet. So he asked me—you know—the usual thing in a very beautiful and unusual way—and—"

"You said 'no'?" supplied the Cynic incredulously.

"I'm here," said Jaconetta lightly; "isn't that proof enough? I said I was sorry, but I didn't know how to care that way — being only 'an amusing little cuss with a pretty, curly, little soul.' You recognise the description?"

"He protested, of course," suggested Stanford with a dry smile.

"He might have protested," admitted

Jaconetta. "I really think he would have, but you see — there was something — I was wearing a locket on a long, gold chain, and I stood up rather suddenly just then — and it caught on the edge of a chair — and it flew open — and there was a man's face inside — and he couldn't help seeing it; and I cried out before I thought — and of course after that it was no use for me to say anything, and — and there you are! That's the end of it."

She finished with outspread hands in a quaint gesture.

Stanford nodded, and leaning one elbow on the table, flung the other arm over the back of his chair.

"It's quite dramatic," he drawled. "What next? Go on."

"Nothing much!" said Jaconetta slowly.

"Nothing very sensational, that is. He only said — quietly, you know — 'Won't you let me see it?' and when he had looked at the picture he said that it had fine eyes, but the mouth was weak, and did I believe in the psychology of faces? Then he said

that if he had thought, he might have known—"

"Known what?"

"I'm only repeating his words," she defended. "He might have known that a little star-eyed salamander like me hadn't played with fire all her life without burning her fingers and having her heart branded. He said he'd sing me one more song, and he went back to the piano again."

"The ruling passion," commented the Cynic. "What was his song?"

Jaconetta quoted instantly in an absent monotone:

"The sweetest flower that blows, I give you ere
we part—
To you it is a rose—to me it is my heart."

She added carefully, "There was a bowl

She added carefully, "There was a bowl of his roses on the table."

"Cheap theatricals," Stanford observed with a disparaging lightness.

"I dare say," Jaconetta agreed coolly. "Do you know the last line? It goes, 'You think it but a rose — ah me, it is my heart!' When he had sung it, in a way to break the heart in your body, he got up from the piano bench and smiled at me, 'Nice little bit of appassionato, isn't it?' he said, just as you'd say 'nice day,' or 'nice color in that sketch.' Then he went home; and I cried till my eyes ached, because I'd had a chance to love a really big Celebrity and couldn't do it. Isn't it a funny world?"

She began to draw on her gloves, smiling above the little jerks and pats she gave them at the Cynic's sombre look.

"Go on!" she pleaded, "get it off your mind. I feel a moral reaction approaching. You have your Sankey and Moody look. Do say it and have it over with! You don't approve, of course. I didn't expect you to. That's why I told you about him."

"No," said Stanford quietly. "It's not a question of my approval or disapproval. I learned the futility of that, where you're concerned, long ago. I'm just wondering about the man in the locket. Who was he?"

Iaconetta looked startled. Beneath the

table her fingers sought hastily, and closed upon a small round locket hung upon a long, thin, gold chain.

"He has fine eyes," she evaded, "but his mouth is weak."

"I didn't for a moment suppose you'd tell," the Cynic admitted coldly. "But it gave me rather a jolt — I didn't know, Jack, that there was any one man calling for so much in your accounts."

"Didn't you?" asked Jaconetta with surprise and interest.

"I did not," he repeated grimly. "But he must call for a good deal if you can sit in the dark listening to an old song and cry over him."

"I wasn't —" Jaconetta began indignantly. "Oh, listen!"

The orchestra that, all the evening, had been ranging from tumultuous Italian opera to spasmodic rag-time was beginning a new theme. The violin sang it over and above the deeper orchestral notes in a wistful, lingering melody and the cello throbbed an echo.



"Jaconetta clutched her chain. 'My locket!' she cried, with a little gasp."

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY ASTOR, LENOX AND TILDEN FOUNDATION PROPERTY

NEW 1 WE BOCIETY LIGRARY Jaconetta turned back to the Cynic when the music had deepened into an elaborate reverie.

"That's it," she explained. "'Jes a-wearyin' for you."

"It's rather pretty," he agreed indifferently.

"Let's go home," said Jaconetta. "I'm tired and I want to meditate on life."

She rose with an impulsive movement as the Cynic, thrusting the change from the bill into his pocket, rose, too. There was a little click, followed by a jingling sound, and something rang upon the floor.

Jaconetta clutched her chain. "My locket!" she cried with a little gasp.

"I have it," said the Cynic lightly. He had stooped for it almost before she spoke. "But I'm afraid it's broken — the clasp —"

He pressed it shut, but his finger once lifted, the locket opened unexpectedly within his hold, and his own face looked up at him.

"Please!" cried Jaconetta — too late.

Stanford's eyes darkened to blackness. His voice took on a sudden hush. "You don't expect me to say I'm sorry I saw it, Jack!"

For a moment they faced each other tensely, Jaconetta defiant, the man flushed with triumph, then Jaconetta laughed, shrugging her shoulders inimitably, and held out one chilly little hand.

"Give it to me," she said lightly, "and don't look so disgustingly pleased. I change the picture once a fortnight. This is only your third day in. Did you think I cherished a hopeless passion for you? Don't be silly, Stan!"

Uncertain, with all the egotist's fear of ridicule upon him, he hesitated, and was lost.

"Upon my word!" said Jaconetta. "I suppose you fancied yourself the hero of this tale of woe? The conceit of Man amazes me! You ought to be made to pay excess baggage for it. Let's go home!"

She led the way across the room, while the orchestra lilted behind them, and on her lips was easy, mocking laughter — but in her eyes there was none.

IV JACONETTA AND THE CELT



IV.

JACONETTA AND THE CELT

netta, "and there was a man—"
"Why the italics?" suggested
Stanford coldly. "In my somewhat lengthy experience of you, there is always a man."

"And that," Jaconetta explained friendly-wise, "is one reason for your somewhat lengthy experience. If you had been the sole appreciator of my sirenic sweetness, you would long ago have flickered out. It's because one or two others find me amusing, as well — because when you ask to come on Thursday, there's someone else ahead of you, and you have to wait till Saturday — because your roses are not the only ones I press between the pages of Felicia Hemans —"

"Don't be silly," the Cynic interrupted at this point.

Jaconetta laughed. She pushed the dark hair off her forehead, and twisted her soft, red mouth into an insulting semblance of polite surprise. In the glare of the bonfire she seemed not so much a woman, as a small, impertinent boy. Her wet bathing suit set itself closely to the lines of her slender body, and she sat upon her small black-stockinged feet, Turk fashion.

Stanford stretched lazily beside her, burrowed both hands into the dim, warm sand and drew them out again.

"Anyhow," he reminded, "about the man?" Jaconetta laughed again. Around the fire the leaping shadows showed harmony of ten resolved into a series of five duos. Only a chaperon, the stoutest matron on the beach, sat lazily aloof, wrapped in a long, grey cape, her drowsy eyes misting comfortably with the smoke of dreams.

"The man?" said Jaconetta, and sighed elaborately. "He was an Irishman. Aren't the cliffs dark to-night? And isn't the world big? And do you suppose if I

were to walk in the wild, wet woods yonder a bear would get me?" Which was distinctly a Jaconettian way of encouraging curiosity.

"I think," he assured her threateningly, "a bear may get you here — unless you're good. Go on, Jack! I'd rather like to know about the Hibernian romance. There've been one or two things since you came back —"

Across the fire a throaty baritone began without preface:

"Ah, now, shtop your philanderin'."

Jaconetta lifted a small, attentive fore-finger.

"Listen!" she murmured. "Oh, very well, then — there was a man; and it was the fourth day out; and his name — his lengthy and illustrious name — was Michael O'Ferragh Kearney. A nice boy from Arizona brought him up to my steamer chair, and presented him. Does that begin like a romance?"

"I seem," admitted the Cynic, "to have

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heard it somewhere before. Still, we'll pass it. He was red-headed, of course, with an open expression of countenance."

"Open," said Jaconetta approvingly, "to a degree. But his hair was black and curly, and he had the bluest eyes that ever looked from a grown man's face—also, a profusion of black lashes; sunburnt, red cheeks; and white teeth."

"He must have looked like a chromo," observed the Cynic, with a trace of unnecessary acerbity.

Jaconetta considered.

"No-o — he looked like a nice, clean, eager boy, who'd grown up unexpectedly. If you're going to be nasty, we won't talk about him."

"Take it back. I'm probably jealous."

"That would be it," said Jaconetta. She laughed, clasping her hands about her knees, drawn up beneath her chin. Her eyes narrowed, looking out to sea, and a restless little pain flickered about her mouth. "Beyond a doubt, Stan, that would be it."

"Go on," he said briefly.

- "Oh!" Jaconetta came back from something, not clearly of the moment.
- "Well, he was presented. He said, with the richest conceivable brogue, but a voice, Stan, to be remembered — a deep, warm, laughing Irish voice; 'I've been beggin' to meet ye.'"
- "To which," Stanford offered in the interval that followed, "you replied appropriately—"
- "Appropriately," Jaconetta accepted, "as ever: 'How do you do?'"
 - "H'mph!"
- "At that, nevertheless, he said: 'May I sit down?' And I, appropriately as ever, remarked that he might. Are you interested?"
- "Probably shall be," conceded the Cynic, "later on."
- On Jaconetta's face a smile wavered and grew.
- "Even I," she protested, "can't entirely ignore the little decencies of life. How was I to know that, two hours afterward, he would ask me to marry him?"

"He didn't!" Stanford denied incredulously, startled for once out of his indifferent poise.

"Cable," said Jaconetta, "to Michael O'Ferragh Kearney, Ballyclare, County Downs, Ireland; and ask him if I lie. I'll admit that if I'd known what he was going to do, I might have altered my reception of him in the beginning. I might have started to my feet with a loud shriek, upon meeting his glance—"

"You are a great little goose," said the Cynic, but he said it with the indulgent tenderness a strong man sometimes accords to folly in woman, and Jaconetta smiled wistfully in the dark.

The bonfire was dying down. A softer crimson rosed the shadowy figures round it, and the throaty baritone had fallen to a mellow humming.

"Nevertheless," persisted Jaconetta, "and notwithstanding everything, I speak the truth. He did—at the end of two hours."

"Pretty darned fresh," commented the Cynic grimly.

- "Not in the least; he meant it."
- "After two hours? Quite likely!"
- "Oh, if you're going to be fussy," said Jaconetta coldly, "and object to all the dramatic situations in my story, I won't tell it to you."

The Cynic put out a hand, and covered one of hers with it lightly.

"Go on, Jack. Two hours it is."

After the lapse of an infinitesimal moment, Jaconetta shook off the hand.

- "And he wasn't the only one that 'pretty darned fresh' might apply to."
 - "Jack! My dear girl!"
- "There were quotation marks," said Jaconetta hastily, "in my voice. However—about the wild Irishman. He began in the middle of things, as it were, with a brief sketch of his past, present, and future. Six years ago, he said, he had been in Paris on a holiday—'a raw kid of twenty-three'—and the notion took him to go to America. So he wrote his father he'd be back in six months, and sailed."
 - "Twenty-nine now?"

"That was six years ago," Jaconetta nodded absently. "He went West. He was a cowboy first, then a rancher; and he got hold of some mines—good ones. In any case, he said he'd made 'big money,' and he was going home to round up the fatted calf."

"Big money," Stanford offered disparagingly, "is easy talk."

Jaconetta sifted the sand through her fingers.

"No, it was true. The nice boy from Arizona knew him out West. He told me, too. And I knew the nice boy's people, so it was straight enough. He had two big cattle ranches, and a mine."

"Then what on earth -"

"Why," said Jaconetta—"let me tell it my own way, Stan—you do interrupt appallingly! He'd been living among horned cattle, and prairies, and things, till he'd forgotten how very nice a nice girl could be, that was all; and when I smote his vision—"

"You were the only girl aboard ship?"

"Heavens, no!"

[&]quot;Go on."

"Oh, well," admitted Jaconetta modestly, "I dare say there was something about me—but be that as it may—when we had been talking half an hour, I knew his past. At the end of another half hour, I had his ambitions at my finger tips, and after that"—she stifled a little sigh—"he began to make love to me. A great many men make love to me, Stan."

"Doubtless without encouragement," rejoined the unfeeling Cynic.

"It is not," said Jaconetta, "incredibly difficult to encourage the average man. You have only to pet his vanity with the tips of your fingers, and he says to himself, says he: 'Poor little thing! I've been and gone and done it again. I can tell from the look in her eyes. Jove! I ought to be ashamed of myself.'"

The Cynic laughed shortly. Jaconetta continued, unmoved:

"The wild Irishman, to do him justice, had no such idea. He didn't fence. He didn't even lead up to it warily. His hand and heart came like a bolt from the blue — if you see what I mean. It was in the beginning of the second hour, something like this "— her long drawl took on an inimitable and delicious touch of brogue — "'I've made big money — I've two ranches and a mine. What I've got, I got with me two hands and me wits — but it wants more. The money's nothin' to me — the ranches and the mine are nothin' — the whole round divil of a worruld is nothin' — without what goes in the heart of me.'"

"Sufficiently explicit," said the Cynic. Jaconetta nodded.

"Exactly. So I answered quite prompt and proper: 'And what goes in your heart?'"

"What did he say to that?"

"He said: 'I knew, the minit I laid eyes on the wicked, laughin' little face of ve.'"

"I said it was absurd," continued Jaconetta, "and he said love never was absurd. He said: 'Do ye know what love is?' And I said: 'I've seen a few copies.' Then he said: 'It's to walk in the sunshine, black-

blind, unless one other walks beside ye. It's to wake all night because the day's not long enough for the sweetness of yer thoughts. It's to suffer, and be happy in the pain. It's the top of the mornin'— and the blackness of the pit. If ye know what it is, no one can tell ye; and if ye don't, no one can tell ye, neither. But I'm thinking, that with those big, wonderin' eyes o' yours, ye will have learned early.'"

The Cynic was silent.

"Did you tell him," he inquired at last, "that you were the happiest, most irresponsible, most utterly careless young person who ever wore a petticoat—and that the juggling of emotions was your meat and bread?"

"I told him it was pie to me," she accepted gravely, "and added that I was twenty-eight and a widow."

" Jack!"

"I did," said Jaconetta firmly. "You mustn't blame me, Stan. I was startled, and a widow sounded so safe — a widow of twenty-eight."

"A widow of twenty-eight would just about suit you," Stanford agreed, with a reluctant grin. "You'd have each returning ghost thinking he was the only one about the premises. I swear, Jack—"

Jaconetta abandoned herself to mirth, in a succession of deliciously suppressed chuckles.

"It doesn't really matter," she objected, "because he declined to believe me. He said he'd give me twenty-three at the most; and that I was no widow, because he'd looked me up in the passenger list. Also, the nice boy had answered questions about me. So—are you interested, Stan?"

"Considerably."

"So I said I didn't know anything about him, beyond his name — and he produced credentials."

"Mere matter of pen and ink and a little ingenuity."

"Not the kind he had. There was a letter from his mother in Ballyclare; and his passage on the *Lusitania*—he was booked to sail two days after he got into port; then

a wire from the St. Regis — his reservation of rooms for those two days, and a letter from the nice boy's father to a banker in New York. He couldn't have faked those."

"No," admitted the Cynic, with some reluctance, "those would be solid enough."

"For a long time I thought he was funning," said Jaconetta thoughtfully. "I laughed, you know — anyone would. But he insisted and protested till at last I saw —"

"He was in earnest, eh?"

"Absolutely. He said he hadn't asked to be presented before, because he wanted to be sure. He had been watching me on deck, every one of those three first days. Why, Stan, he told me almost to the minute what I had done, whom I had talked to, where I had sat. I don't mean to be a triumph of egotism, but — I knew it was real. When I objected to the suddenness of the thing, he said it made no difference whether I'd known him ten minutes or ten years. That I ought to know for myself without someone to label my feelings. He wanted

to build a house on the biggest of the two ranches—any kind of a house I liked, so long as it looked to the West—and I should plan every room of it as I pleased. He said there'd be a machine if I wanted it; or if I wanted horses he'd lashin's of those. He said he'd both hands full of money, and now he knew why—it was for spending with me and for me."

"Vulgar sort of inducement to matrimony," suggested the Cynic drily.

Jaconetta shook her head.

"No. He wasn't vulgar. He was more like a boy, offering you all his best-beloved junk. He wasn't vulgar — because I asked him if he didn't know that one sort of a girl might take him at his word in a minute, merely because of what he could give her. I said: 'You're rather indiscreet, aren't you?'"

"Rather," the Cynic observed, without sympathy.

"And he said," proceeded Jaconetta dreamily, "'I'm not askin' that kind of a girl!'"

Stanford frowned and shrugged.

"How could he tell in a couple of hours? Women look pretty much alike — above a certain level."

"Do they?" asked Jaconetta.

She winced a little. There are times when the Cynic touches her on the raw; when she shrinks from something in him that is not of her kind, and was never meant to be. At such times she moves swiftest to shield him from himself.

"I know," she added now; "you mean he hadn't waited to see below the surface. Still — I told him all of that, and how do you suppose he argued?"

Stanford declined to conjecture.

"He said: 'Faith, if ye shtood at wan end of a pin, and I shtood at the other, by the time I got to the middle, I'd know I loved ye!'"

"Going some," commented the Cynic briefly.

"Wasn't it?" said Jaconetta.

Beyond the embers of the fire figures arose amid a sudden spurt of laughter.

- "Come on we're goin' in again!" called a man's voice cheerfully.
- "Much obliged, we've had enough," said Stanford.

Jaconetta added an indolent explanation.

"We'll stay here with Mrs. Cartwright."

Mrs. Cartwright smiled comfortably, being only half-way free of the delightful reverie induced by warmth, and quiet, and dusk. Her young son, his head on her capacious lap, slept like the material cherub he was, and she brooded above him largely, her back against an upturned, derelict skiff.

- "Don't stay in too long," she warned the bathers mildly; then drew her cape close about her, and abandoned herself once more to meditation.
- "You didn't care about going in again?" asked Stanford carelessly.
- "Now that you ask me," retorted Jaconetta, "I did not."
- "I wanted to hear the rest of your Irishman."

A flippant appreciation accented Jaconetta's speech.

- "'Your story interests me strangely," she mocked. "Where was I?"
 - "At the end of a pin."
- "Oh, yes! Well, apparently, he had gotten to the middle. He wanted me to marry him and sail on the Lusitania for Ballyclare."
 - "Did he think you were crazy?"
- "My answer exactly," said Jaconetta approvingly, "whereupon he said, very well then, he'd postpone his sailing two weeks, send a wireless to the St. Regis, reserving his rooms for that long, and occupy those two weeks in calling upon me daily, so that at the end of the time I'd know him well enough to marry him."
 - "You were with your Cousin Martha."
- "Again, my own answer. This is distinctly weird, Stan; we must be in telepathic communication."
- "Merely common sense," said the Cynic. He added, after a moment of reflection: "I'm glad you had prudence enough to call him down."

Jaconetta objected promptly.

"I didn't, though. I said I was with Cousin Martha, that we were going to the Martha Washington, and that if he chose to send up his card when I was in, I would not decline to receive it; but that I thought he'd be awfully foolish to postpone his sailing. He might be no nearer winning out at the end of two weeks than at—"

"Might be?" repeated the Cynic in lively horror.

"Might be!" said Jaconetta. "You say it almost exactly like he did."

"Do you mean to tell me that you let him think—"

"It has never been my habit," Jaconetta interrupted severely, "to interfere with the mental processes of any nice young man. Let him, it, or they, think — if they can — has always been my motto."

"You need shaking," said the Cynic brusquely.

"Perhaps if they'd whipped me oftener when I was little, I'd be a better pirl—eh?"

"I wouldn't doubt it."

- "I wish they had," said Jaconetta regretfully; "I often think, Stan, that if I were a better girl, I'd be more worthy of your friendship — wouldn't I?"
- "Do you want me to shake you?" demanded the exasperated Cynic; but when he made a prefatory movement Jaconetta waved him aside with one sharp gesture of a small brown hand.
- "You know better. Don't you be silly! We were talking about Michael O'Ferragh Kearney, weren't we?"
- "He was just about to postpone his sailing," suggested Stanford.

He leaned on one elbow in the sand, and dug holes with his left hand scientifically.

- "So he was," said Jaconetta.
- "Did he?"
- "He said he'd take a chance."

There was a long silence, through which the cries of the bathers came eerily across the water.

"You've been home a week," said the Cynic slowly at last, in the voice of one who computes invisible dates. "That was six weeks ago," Jaconetta contributed evenly.

"And you didn't go to Ireland?"

"The West remains."

Stanford stopped digging holes, and concentrated his attention upon his companion.

"Oh!" he remarked inscrutably.

"He is so clean, and decent, and likable," said Jaconetta slowly. "He is 'white'—isn't that what you say?—clean through."

"You might say it," admitted Stanford coolly, "though it's not the most appropriate phraseology for a girl."

"Am I speaking to a girl?" inquired Jaconetta sweetly. "Or about a girl? In any case, you doubtless follow me. I am trying to convey to you the fact that he is one of the very nicest men I have ever met. He is impulsive, but he is strong, too. And he has a laugh that makes the whole world seem pleased. Also, when you are a little tired, and a little lonesome, and a little reckless and a big, dear boy of a man comes up through a trap-door, on his way to Ireland, and takes you right off your feet —"

She hesitated and stopped, twisting her fingers tightly together in her lap.

"Off your feet," said the Cynic slowly. "Somehow — I've had an idea lately — off your feet — why haven't you told me before, Jack?"

"I don't know," said Jaconetta.

She said it rather softly.

Stanford reached around behind him to where his coat lay huddled on the sand, and felt in the pocket with practised fingers. After a moment he found cigarette case and matches, and hunched himself back into his original position.

"Soon?" he asked between the first two puffs.

He had time to blow out the match and throw it aside before Jaconetta answered. She had pushed the soft hair once more away from her eyes, and sat there hugging her knees like some small, dreamy goblin.

"Eh?" she asked lazily. "Soon what?"

"Are you going to be married soon?" replied the Cynic, with obviously curbed intensity.

"I don't know," said Jaconetta. She had all the appearance of viewing for the first time, and with a pleasing interest, the subject of his question. "What should you say? A good many people do seem to be fond of me, but I don't like to ask them their intentions. Anyhow, a fortune teller once told me I'd never marry under forty—what?"

"I was talking sense," said the Cynic coldly. "If you don't care to tell me, say so."

"I thought I was talking just like you," Jaconetta protested meekly. "What is it you want to know, Stan?"

"Nothing — unless you care to tell me. I merely asked"—the Cynic's tone was stiffly aloof —"when you expect to marry Mr. Kearney."

"Mr. Kearney!" said Jaconetta, amazed. She flung back her head with a movement of utter, appalled surprise. "Michael O'Ferragh Kearney? When am I going to—For pity's sake! Who said I was going to marry him?"

- "Didn't you?" demanded the Cynic grimly.
- "Well, I should hope not," said Jaconetta, with a virtuous show of disapproval.

 "A man I'd only known for two hours?

 Really, Stan!"
- "And two weeks," Stanford reminded her, daily."
 - "Who said he stayed."
 - "Didn't you?"
 - "I said he wanted to."
 - "You wouldn't let him?"
 - "I told him it wasn't any use."

The Cynic finished his cigarette and flung it away. He drew a long, careful breath of relief.

- "Well," he said deliberately, "if you aren't the —"
- "I may be," Jaconetta agreed at once—
 "but what's the difference?"

The bathers were coming back. They splashed through the shallower water, reluctant to leave it. In the shadow of the skiff Mrs. Cartwright dozed. The bonfire had fallen to ashes.

- "He had his nerve," said Stanford.
- "It's a good thing to have," said Jaconetta, "when you're asking somebody to marry you."
 - "You liked him, didn't you, Jack?"
 - "Yes, Stan; I liked him uncommonly."
- "Do you know," said the Cynic thoughtfully, "you're such a reckless little beggar —you're always taking chances — I wonder why you passed that one up?"
 - "I wonder!" said Jaconetta.

Then she began to laugh.

- "I told him," she explained, wide, mocking eyes on Stanford's fresh-lit cigarette, "that I loved another."
 - "He didn't know you," said the Cynic.
 - "Do you?" asked Jaconetta.

V JACONETTA AND THE CAPTAIN

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JACONETTA AND THE CAPTAIN

GGUST in the city is—'Lord forgive us, cinders, ashes, dust!' I don't know why I came home at all," said Jaconetta disgustedly. "Do you?"

The Cynic essayed a silent smile. He knew no more than Jaconetta herself, but he had acquired in early youth the habit of taking goods provided by the gods, and declining to observe the teeth of gift horses. Therefore, when early that morning, Jaconetta's wire had informed him that she would be in town by the noon train, he had made his arrangements accordingly, and now at mid-moonlight of a perfect summer night, they stood on the end of the Yacht Club pier, with Lake Pontchartrain stretching, like silver samite, unwrinkled around them, and

the tangled chords of "Madame Butterfly," exquisitely blent by distance, drifting out from the casino.

"You were homesick," he suggested presently.

"I'm never homesick," said Jaconetta, playing a brisk polacca on the rail, "when I'm having a good time."

"Then you got into mischief," the Cynic decided instantly. "Beyond a doubt, you did something you had no business to. Go on, Jack, let's have all the horrible details—it's no use prevaricating. When a young person returns to the bosom of her family, with the undue haste you've shown this time, after repeated assurances that she's having the time of her life, and means to stay at least a fortnight longer, one can't help suspecting that—"

"Well, what?" Jaconetta defied him.

"It was a man." The Cynic smiled provokingly. "That's understood; but why this haste? Did he threaten to end your career of crime, or did you discover that he was only a ribbon clerk on his vacation?"

One of Jaconetta's most unruly weapons is her laugh. It broke from her now as she leaned on the rail, and tilted her thin, brown, little face with its deep dimples, and the eyes that seem always too big for it, back over her shoulder to look at the Cynic.

"I'm not telling you because you want me to," she defended blithely, "but because it's too good to keep, and I'm pining to relate it. Shall I begin at the beginning?"

"Begin at the end," said the Cynic coolly, and tell me first why I was accorded the unusual favor of a wire announcing your return?"

"Oh, that?" Jaconetta drew off her long, black gloves, and twisted them between her hands. "I thought I had told you. Tomorrow I'm going to New York with father for a month."

"Does he know it?" inquired the Cynic, with meaning.

"He didn't until this morning," she admitted frankly. "Do you, or don't you, want to hear my story? Because that's why I wired you — I knew you'd appreciate it."

"Having done the fearful deed you have the usual murderer's instinct to talk about it, and you know I'm safe. Go on," said the Cynic.

Jaconetta nodded. "You win," she observed slangily. "Well, you know I've been at the Howards' place this last two weeks—"

"I've had one postal postmarked there."
Jaconetta ignored the interruption. "Did
you notice," she asked abruptly, "that the
State militia went on its annual encampment
a week ago? No? It did, anyhow, just
five miles from the town I was visiting."

"I should have thought," the Cynic offered scornfully, "you had a soul above brass buttons."

"I have," said Jaconetta, "but I'd have to be awfully tall to have a heart above them, wouldn't I?" She went on in haste: "You see, we had a house-party, with five or six men, and I had got quite used to having civilians around, so that a uniform rather appealed to me as something new. Anyhow, there was a man—"

"Here beginneth the first lesson," intoned the Cynic solemnly.

Jaconetta looked across to where the lights of Bucktown reflected themselves shimmeringly in the smooth dark water, and the higher, whiter electrics of restaurant and casino strung lines of fire upon the summer night.

"I can't begin to tell you," she said impressively, "what a really beautiful man he was. Very tall, good shoulders, low drawling voice, impressively regular features, awfully bored expression; — you know the kind."

The Cynic himself is barely above the average height. He is slender, and his ugly, clever face is as keenly alert as Jaconetta's own. He only smiled curiously at her description.

"He was a captain or something," said Jaconetta carefully; "something that had to ride a horse—and he rode like a centaur. Furthermore, he simply didn't know that woman existed. Our whole house-party was introduced to him at tea in the gen-

eral's tent one afternoon, and he never whimpered."

"Is that the usual method of procedure in such cases?"

"You know what I mean," Jaconetta retorted; "he never batted an eye. He simply bent his head an eighth of an inch, murmured something into his hat, and went out again in five minutes. This in spite of the fact that three of us were distinctly pretty, one a facial fortune, and one myself. He was bored, evidently, obviously, ostentatiously bored!"

She stopped to draw breath, and smiled sideways at the Cynic with a flicker of lashes bewilderingly long.

"It's the easiest way to interest a woman, young or old," she said, with a shameless little chuckle. "Pretend that she bores you, and she'll out-Venus Venus trying to learn why. So long as you can seem not to want her, she's yours out of sheer curiosity."

The Cynic only smiled a little and Jaconetta went on, leaning her chin in her hands, elbows on the rail.

"We were talking about the captain. He was so bored, you know, he even forgot to come and tell us good-bye when we left, and one of the Frisby girls told me that he never remembered he'd met her, though it was the fifth time. I want you to see that he was really a temptation to any self-respecting woman. Somebody had to show him!"

"And it might as well be you?"

"Exactly," said Jaconetta. "I had an idea he might be taught to sit up and beg, with a little care; but I didn't quite see how to go about it. He didn't call, he never came near us when we drove out to the drills, or for tea with the general, and I couldn't very well send a servant for him; but Fate took a hand at last, and the town gave the soldiers a big dance. It was pure providence that I had my newest frock with me. You've never seen it, have you?"

"What's it like?" asked the Cynic patiently.

"Pink," said Jaconetta reverently; "pink
— with a big splash of coral velvet on the
left shoulder. Honestly when I have it on,

I can hardly tell myself from Maxine Elliott; and my hair went up beautifully that night, just loose enough to make you sure the marcelling was native to the strand."

She paused, lost in a reminiscent contemplation of her own exceeding charms, till the Cynic touched her elbow gently.

"I know," he said reassuringly, "you were a vision of delight. But what about the captain — did he fall down and worship?"

"Wait," said Jaconetta cautiously.

"There's something else comes in first. I had promised to go to the dance with Allen—he's one of the Howard boys, you know, and he dances like an archangel with a past—but two hours before we were ready to start he sprained his ankle. Then two of the other men had left that morning and one had to stay with Allen, so you see, we went to that dance, one chaperon, two men and five girls."

"Unequal equation," suggested the Cynic.

Jaconetta gloomed upon him for a moment. "I want you to see," she explained,
"that I was bored — horribly bored.

There was no one going that I liked, and the truth is, if you must have it, that I stood out the first two dances against the wall. It's a blot on my escutcheon that time can never efface. By the third dance I was fit for 'treason, stratagems, and spoils.' Enter the captain."

"The pink dress fetched him?" the Cynic inquired cheerfully.

"Not so," said Jaconetta, with brevity. "Mrs. Frisby fetched him, and it was easy to see when he asked for the dance that he hoped I'd decline. I didn't, however. I'd have danced with a broomstick just then, rather than continue as part of the mural decorations. Moreover, I trusted something to my dancing - it's rather unusual, though I say it as shouldn't. I've often thought I'd have been something of a hit if father had thought to start me out in the chorus. Not toe-dancing, you know, nor the kind that bulges your muscles out, but something original and artistic. Have you ever seen Maude Adams dance?"

"I've seen you," said the Cynic under-

standingly, "and I'll admit you're thistledown, if you like. You're a modest young person! Go on with the story. Did the gallant captain capitulate?"

"He did not — noticeably. True, he refrained from stepping on my feet, and when I commented on the warmth of the room he said, 'Jove, yes!' but that was all. It was obviously his intention to leave me with a few kind and well-chosen words as soon as the waltz was over, and I just can't begin to tell you how bored and despondent I was."

She stopped abruptly with a sudden apprehensive recollection. "Have I made you understand that I was bored?" she asked anxiously. "Desperately bored?"

"I suppose," said the Cynic, "that's to serve as reason and excuse for any folly. Yes, you were bored, and he was bored, and it's the one touch of nature that makes the whole world imprudent. What happened?"

Jaconetta suppressed a smile that came back, however, and tugged at the corners of her mouth and quivered in her voice.

"When the waltz was over," she stated slowly, "we went to walk on the long gallery with ever so many other couples not because he wanted to, you understand, but because I was chatting gaily when we passed my chaperon in the doorway, and he couldn't very easily have stopped me without a well-directed blow."

She paused to giggle a moment at some secret memory. "Well, we walked, and I did a very amusing monologue, tearing my hair all the time, in a wild search for something that would tie the captain to my chariot wheels for the rest of the evening. He was easily the big scream of the dance."

"The what!" cried the Cynic, aghast. "Really, Jack!"

"Eh," said Jaconetta innocently. "Oh, that? Is it no language for a lady? All right then, I won't use it. Only I heard it at the Orpheum, and it's such an attractive word. You've tangled me all up now. Where was I?"

"The captain," suggested the Cynic coldly, "was the big scream."

"So he was; or ace high," amended Jaconetta gravely, "if you like that better. In other words, all the girls were envying me, and I had no mind to let go. We sat down finally in a couple of chairs by the railing and the captain made ready to say good-bye. 'Thanks awfully for the waltz,' he said. He wasn't even looking at me, but calculating the quickest route to the smoking room, I could see that. 'I've enjoyed it so much. Charmed to have met you, Miss Lane.'"

Jaconetta looked up at the Cynic to see that her words took full effect, and swung the long gloves she held back and forth against the pier railing.

"He stumbled a little over the name," she explained, with a dawning smile, "and I saw that he was uncertain of it. Equally, I saw that he wanted to go; so I stood up—we both stood up—in fact he stood up first—and I said as sweetly as if seven little ring-tailed devils hadn't just whispered the words in my ear: 'Mrs. Lane.' Then I blushed."

"I don't wonder," said the Cynic drily.

"Well. I didn't do it on purpose," Jaconetta admitted generously, "but it looked iust as good. There's really very little difference between the blush of extreme nervousness and an appealing shyness. Now, most people think I'm shy — I'm not!"

"I never supposed for a moment that you were," the Cynic retorted a little impatiently. "Go on, Jaconetta. You ought to be whipped. What did the man say?"

"You needn't be unhappy about it. not your immortal soul," said Jaconetta airily. "Well, he swung round on his heel, and looked at me hard for the first time since he'd met me and then he said" - she dropped to a slow, rich drawl, inimitably - " 'Lord, child! You're not married?' Then I said: 'Why not? Of course I am. Isn't that rather a funny thing to say to me?' I looked quite hurt. And he said: 'Is your husband -- ' And I said: 'No, certainly not; he isn't dead; he's in New Orleans."

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She stopped short with a sudden quaint grimace.

"Come to think of it, that sounds like one of those 'he-is-not-dead-but-in-Philadelphia' jokes, doesn't it? I didn't mean it that way, though New Orleans is not hasty, especially in summer. Don't you think so?"

"Go on with the story," the Cynic ordered inexorably. "Did you really tell that fellow that you were married?"

"Well, I wouldn't put it just that way," said Jaconetta, with the air of one desiring peace at any consideration, "but I'm afraid he inferred it along with several other things, and it had its effect. The minute he thought I was married he became intensely interested. You remember it was the third dance I had with him? Well, our parting was not till the fourteenth number, when I had to leave with the Howards."

"Twelve dances — all evening in fact," the Cynic stated, without a trace of amusement in his dry, curt voice.

"Quite so," Jaconetta acquiesced pensively. "But some we sat out, just around

the corner from a big Chinese lantern on the gallery. We danced only every other time. I am thrilled with pride, even now. to recall the lies I lied that night. You should have heard me. Positively, I'd be a fortune as a press agent. He asked hundreds of questions and never tripped me once. Where was my wedding ring? I never wore it - I insinuated softly that it meant an unhappy tie to me - but my birthday diamond, slipped to the correct finger, did duty for the engagement ring. How long had I been married? One year, and I don't say he couldn't guess from my manner that it was one year too long. I was Mrs. Jack Lane, married at nineteen, very young, very much disillusioned, very confiding to kind strangers. My husband was in New Orleans. I was on a visit to the Howards and would join him later in the summer. No, I didn't believe in love it didn't last. Yes, I had been silly to marry so young. I had thought it a fine thing all the bridesmaids and fuss — but one learns. I did a really good sigh just there. And

at intervals — longer intervals as the evening wore on — the captain would protest: 'But - Lord, child! You're not married?' Honestly "- Jaconetta drew 2 breath - "you can't think how real it all was. He was so sympathetic and gentle with me I almost believed in the husband myself. I didn't have to think to describe him: I could just see him. The captain almost caught me once, though. I was launched on a description of how I had met Jack in Virginia. I said he was a University of Virginia man. 'Funny,' said the captain, 'so was I. What year?' I said I didn't know. 'He graduated before I met him.' Wasn't that quick?"

"Amazingly," the Cynic agreed.

He folded his arms and leaned back against the rail watching Jaconetta's face intently in the moonlight. The lights of the casino down the wharf winked suddenly and went out, for the moving pictures were being shown, and the band shrilled the chorus of a popular song.

"Of course he made love to you."

"What a beastly way you have of expressing yourself," Jaconetta reproved coldly. "I think I may say, however, that I have rarely met a more sympathetic soul. fairly yearned to take me by the hand and comfort me." She broke into a fit of impish laughter. "Why, oh, why," she begged when she could speak, "do you suppose it was, that when he had no business to comfort me, he longed to do it? Those are his very words. And when I stood against the wall at first, fairly hungering for comfort, he longed not, though it was not only his right but his duty - why?"

The Cynic did not even smile. He drummed viciously on the rail.

"Well," said Jaconetta rather uneasily, "it's getting late, isn't it? I'll hurry to the unhappy end. He wanted to call on me at the Howards. I said he couldn't. Said Jack wasn't nice about things like that, and - you know. He knew. He put my cloak on when I left, and helped me tenderly into the carriage. Were we never to see each other again? The evening had been a dream. He could not believe it was over. Neither could I. He could not let me go out of his life like this. All of this, you understand, in a whisper, and he whispered well — so few men do."

"Did you refuse to let him call?" the Cynic questioned, with a suggestion of belated hope in his low, brusque tones, quite well removed at the moment from any undue sentimentality.

"I did," said Jaconetta virtuously. "I told him it was more than impossible; that the evening had been a very perfect pleasure to me, but it must end there. 'Ships that pass in the night,' etc., etc. He may have inferred that I would never forget him while life endured, I don't know."

"He probably did, but in any case you did one sensible thing — you refused to see him again."

Jaconetta's dimples deepened abruptly, but her smile was demurer than the manner of stained-glass cherubs.

"Yes. He was frightfully fascinating,

but I said 'no' several times. It wasn't my fault that he came."

She waited pensively, eyes on the opalescent shadows of the lake, hands crossed meekly on the rail before her, till the Cynic surrendered in a sudden, unwilling laugh.

"So he came — in spite of you? Did he knock down your sentries at the gate? Wade to you through the blood of your defending army?"

"He telephoned," said Jaconetta frankly. "Don't be silly. It was night before last, and the girls were all up in my room. It was only eight o'clock, but we were all in our kimonos, sitting on the floor telling fortunes. He said: 'How do you do, Miss Lane,' and I said: 'Haven't you made a mistake?' Then he said: 'No.' He had been enlightened and he wanted to congratulate me on having fooled him so prettily. I said: 'Not at all, it was easy.' Then he asked if he mightn't come out and see me, that he had ridden in five miles, in the rain, for that purpose — it was drizzling

a bit — and since there wasn't any Jack to mind — You see, I really had no excuse, and all the girls were teasing me to let him come."

"So you did. I might have known it."

"There are a number of things you might have known," said Jaconetta crossly, "that have never dawned upon you. Yes, I let him come. One of the girls had a darling black chiffon, with a trail, and they dressed me up in it. They combed my hair high, and you remember that topaz comb you gave me once - well, I really looked awfully foxy, quite like the adventuress in 'Nellie, the Beautiful Cloak Model'; all except the cigarette, that is, and the 'Hist!' I told the captain, when he arrived, that I was in mourning for Tack who had died suddenly of locomotor ataxia." She stopped short in dismay, at the Cynic's unfeeling snort. "It's a perfectly respectable thing to have, isn't it?" she demanded anxiously.

"Eminently - creeping paralysis."

"It matters not," said Jaconetta airily.
"It sounds refined. I had to think of some-

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thing and the rest were all so horrid to mention. The captain was very much distressed; so much so in fact that he stayed till a quarter of twelve and told me many things. He wasn't at all bored when you came to know him well, and he knew a lot. There was one breathless moment though, when he stopped in the midst of a detailed account of his symptoms and said: 'You're making fun of me. I believe those other girls are listening behind the portières.' 'You may look, if you like,' I told him, not scornfully, but with a grave, sweet reproach. I had heard the girls slipping away a good ten minutes before. They had been there at least an hour. Wasn't it too funny? Well, he asked me to go driving, to come to tea after the sham battle, to give him all the waltzes at the Frisbys' dance — that's tomorrow night. Really, you've no idea how that cold, proud man unbent. It was easy to see that I had moved him deeply. He almost wept when he said good night, and the next day he sent me a perfectly enormous box of roses. You might tell the whole

thing in three words: I came, I saw, I conquered. Only that's six, of course."

The Cynic shook his head, frowning a little and thrusting his hands deep in his pockets.

"Now I know," he said, with unpleasant frankness, "that you did it from your usual, indiscreet liking for adventures, but what do you suppose that man thought? Jack, you haven't the wisdom of a hairless infant. When are you going to stop playing with fire?"

"I was bored," said Jaconetta stubbornly. She was pulling on her gloves with every appearance of an ardent desire for departure, and suddenly the lights of the casino flared out again. The performance was over and there was a perceptible tide of people to the wharf. "If you want to be really interesting," she added, "you'll take me into town and give me something to eat. I'm downright starving, and I'm going to New York to-morrow. Save the few remarks on wisdom till I come home again."

They crossed the wide end of the pier

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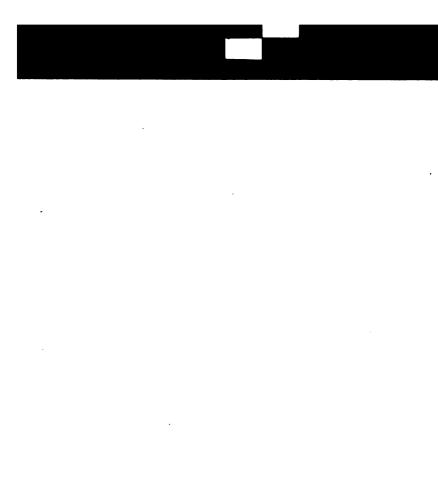
and turned into the last stretch of wharf between them and the crowd.

"After all," the Cynic admitted grudgingly, "it was a silly trick, an absolutely crazy chance to take, not knowing your man; but I don't quite see why you came home, since he was so enthralled and since it came out all right."

"Didn't I tell you?" asked Jaconetta meekly. "That's just it. It didn't come out all right. Of course, I wasn't married, but I found out the next day that he was."



VI JACONETTA AND THE MONK



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VI

JACONETTA AND THE MONK

I was between the tenth and eleventh dances that Jaconetta came out of the ballroom, a small, piquant figure under the escort of a grey-cowled monk. Jaconetta herself wore the black and white of Pierrette. The cocked hat sat upon her dark hair at an angle, delicately impertinent; her lips were very red, and to the softness of her little pointed chin a mouche lent delicious allurement. Through the slits of a black satin mask her brown eyes showed impishly daring.

"Find me a nice, cool, quiet desert island," commanded Jaconetta, "and a large wicker chair — and a fan — and a drink of cold water. You haven't the least idea how I shall love you for it."

"Cross your heart?" insisted the monk.

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"An' hope to die," said Jaconetta.

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- "Not before you love me," he pleaded.
- "Immediately after," said Jaconetta.

The monk laughed, but not without a flavor of a reproach.

"Many a true word spoken in jest," he grumbled, "I reckon it would just about kill you to love anybody longer than a minute."

"Life is long, but love is fleeting," said Jaconetta. "I tell you I want a nice, cool, quiet desert—"

"I've got it!" cried the monk. He led her by subtle turnings to a corner of the wide, dark porch, where a swing hung invitingly empty. It was a hospitable swing and broad, suspended from chains; and the back of it came just to a level with the back of Taconetta's neck.

"Ah-h!" she murmured, as she cuddled herself delightedly among the cushions at one end, "only the hero of a hundred engagements—"

"Shall I get you something cold?" inquired the monk, with just a suggestion of haste.

"I don't want a thing on earth," said Jaconetta, "but to sit here and invite my soul. I hear another dance beginning. Don't let me keep you."

The monk looked over his shoulder down the porch to where all the other grey monks and Pierrettes were dutifully returning to the ballroom. He sounded unreasonably displeased.

"Who've you got this one with?"

Jaconetta drew a long breath of blissful irresponsibility.

- "I don't know and I don't in the least care. I'm going to stay here all by myself and rest. Must you go?"
- "After a hidden hint like that?
- "Dear me! Dear me!" said Jaconetta.
 "I didn't mean to make it too hidden. I'm afraid sometimes I'm not quite frank enough."
- "Oh, yes, you are!" the monk assured her ruefully. "You're frank enough, whatever else you're not."

When his retreating, lanky figure had en-

tered and been lost in the distant doorway, Jaconetta chuckled.

"Ohé!" she sighed and flung one arm restlessly along the back of the swing. The tips of her toes just reached the floor, and she set herself in motion with a little push.

Presently she began to sing, a monotonous little tune with a rising note at the end of every bar. When she had sung it twice through, she fell abruptly into silence, a finger at her lips, staring thoughtfully into the night outside the railing.

It was not a silence that endured for long. Successively, from behind the swing, came footsteps and a voice. The footsteps were leisurely, the voice no less so.

"I wonder," it said with a questioning inflection, "if this isn't my dance?"

At the first word Jaconetta straightened lithely. The corners of her mouth tilted in an irresistible mockery.

"Come out," she said, "into the light, so we can tell."

A grey-cowled, grey-hooded monk obeyed

her, in no hurry. He was not so tall as the first one.

Jaconetta regarded him minutely. She clasped both hands demurely in her lap and shook her head prettily in the soft light.

- "It might be," she conceded, "but I don't seem to remember. Next-door neighbor!"
- "We will sit it out," decided the newcomer calmly. He sat down comfortably at the other end of the swing and crossed his legs.
- "Now this," said Jaconetta, "is an absolutely unexpected pleasure."
- "The first waltz," he reminded her gently, "the third, fifth, seventh, ninth and eleventh. This is the eleventh."
- "Like playing a system, isn't it?" said Taconetta.
- "Only with assured results," returned the monk.

Jaconetta nodded and laughed. She watched him out of wide, inscrutable eyes.

"Please talk," he requested seriously, "the sound of your voice is so soothing. Isn't it a little husky to-night? You must have a cold."

"Who is it you think I am?" asked Jaconetta. She sat forward, elbows on her knees, cuddling her chin in two warm lifted palms.

"My dear little girl," said the monk indulgently, "as if I didn't know!"

"That's an answer to fit anybody."

"I'd hardly mistake you," he stated calmly.

"I don't know," said Jaconetta. She repeated after a moment, with a little affected drawl, "I don't know — masks make a difference."

"You weren't masked last night."

"Last night?" said Jaconetta. She lifted her head in a swift, startled movement. "No. That's quite true. I wasn't masked last night."

"Nor last month."

"Glittering generalities."

"Nor last Sunday," he said deliberately, "at the beach — when the car broke down

— and we had to wait at the inn for supper — and your aunt went to sleep in the tonneau coming back. What?"

"No," said Jaconetta, "I wasn't masked last Sunday, was I?"

"You were your own dear trustful little self," he told her, "as I like you to be without all this rag-tag foolishness and—"

"After all, though," said Jaconetta hesitatingly, "since it's only a mask —"

"I like to look things and people, in the face. Take it off and let me see if your eyes are as blue as ever."

There was a small, significant pause, electric with uncertainties, then Jaconetta laughed. You will remember that her eyes are brown. She sat well back, swinging her feet daintily and shaking her head so that the black balls upon her Pierrette hat bobbed with an impudent raillery.

"Take my word for it," she told him, "they are as blue — as they ever were."

"That's pretty blue," he said tenderly.

"A very pretty blue," said Jaconetta.

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The monk leaned nearer, one arm along the back of the swing, and his voice dropped a note caressingly.

"They're the only eyes in the world, Pierrette! Irish eyes — sea-blue — rubbed in with a smutty finger. And your lashes ____"

"I didn't know," Jaconetta interrupted, that you'd ever given a thought to my lashes."

"You've forgotten that day in the library—"

"Ah!" sighed Jaconetta, in reminiscent haste, "that day!"

"When I measured the shadow they threw on your cheek."

"Six feet," she supplemented innocently, at the very least."

"A third of an inch," he said gravely.

"Dear me!" said Jaconetta in delighted surprise, "was it really?"

"You see," he pointed out, "I don't forget. I haven't forgotten that, nor the dance that night, nor the ride next morning, nor any little thing of that whole splendid week.

That house-party was a mountain-top in my life. When I'm tired, or down on my luck, I like to think of it. I like to remember that you and I were once under the same roof and sat at the same table for seven whole, perfect, splendid days. I like to dream that some day — perhaps —"

"There'll be another house-party?" said Jaconetta.

Her laughter had a slightly breathless sound.

"A house-party of two," said the monk and laid his hand closely upon hers.

Jaconetta freed her fingers in an instant.

- "I should think you might have seen," he urged, "that I hadn't forgotten. You can't pretend to be surprised."
- "Do you mean," she fenced hesitantly, that you want me to remember?"
- "I want you to marry me," he answered, and Jaconetta caught her breath in a little gasp.
 - "I didn't know --"
- "You must have known," he insisted, "that I love you."

- "Don't!" she begged, "don't say it!"
- "Why not? I have said it. Amy!"
- "Amy!" echoed Jaconetta in a whisper.
- "What?" urged the monk. "My dearest girl you're not afraid of me, are you? I can hardly hear you."

Jaconetta leaned back among her cushions, with tightly linked fingers quiet in her lap. She laughed again — a mere ripple of sound.

- "I love the way you say my name," she murmured, "and I'm not afraid of you, either." She added hurriedly, upon the unmistakable intention of his arm, "but I shall be—if you come any nearer."
- "You funny child!" he said with an indulgent tenderness.
- "It makes me nervous," explained Jaconetta diffidently.
 - "Then you don't love me."
- "Oh, good gracious!" protested Jaconetta. "I wouldn't say that." She bit the tip of her finger thoughtfully, tilting her head on one side like a little bird.
 - "If you did, you wouldn't mind --"

- "Oh, it isn't that I mind exactly."
- "You don't think I ought to?"
- "It it seems so sort of personal," said Jaconetta.
- "You darling!" cried the monk beneath his mask. He laughed outright. "But an engagement, little girl, is sort of personal, anyway you look at it, eh? Of course, if you don't want me to put my arm around you, I won't. But, Amy, if you care for me at all—"
- "I hadn't the faintest idea," Jaconetta interpolated hastily, "that you cared for me. I thought you were just being nice. Every one says you're so cold and indifferent and funny. Miss Lane—you know Miss Lane?"
- "Jaconetta? Yes, I know her," said the monk; "why?"

He sounded all at once a little forced, the merest shade less ardent.

"She calls you 'The Cynic,'" Jaconetta nodded wisely; "did you know it? I think it's rather silly of her. As if she knew you by heart; word for word."

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"We're pretty old friends," he admitted grimly, "Jack and I, that's true."

"But you're not cynical. I wouldn't call you that."

"Because you're a darling, blue-eyed baby, with a rose for a mouth and a rainbow for a soul. I wouldn't have you call me that. I wouldn't have you one little hair's breadth changed from what you are!"

"Oh, please — please!" begged Jaconetta. She evaded his touch again, shrinking back among her cushions.

"My dear," said the Cynic gently, don't you love me at all?"

"I don't know," she whispered, "I don't know. I like to have you talk that way, but —"

"If I'm incredibly and inhumanly patient," he offered with the first flicker of humour, "will you some day, when you've known me for years perhaps, let me kiss the tip of your little finger?"

"I think I should like it," said Jaconetta shyly.

"Meantime, you'll try to care for me?"

- "If you won't hurry me up too much I'd love to try."
 - "And I do stand a chance?"
- "Miss Lane would say," she murmured, that you were the one best bet."

The Cynic shrugged his grey cambric shoulders.

- "Jack's different," he objected; "that sort of thing is merely quaint in her. But I never knew another woman that could get away with it. Don't fool with slang, little Amy. You ought to talk in verse."
- "'Oh, lyric love!'" murmured Jaconetta thoughtlessly. She stopped abruptly, with a shielding chuckle of laughter.
- "My dear child!" cried the Cynic, a new lilt of enthusiasm in his voice. "I didn't know you read Browning! Why, Amy! It's like finding a butterfly on a page of Sanskrit. You little Sphinx! I didn't suppose you ever went deeper than Robert W. Chambers—"
- "I'm crazy about his love stories," she confessed frankly. "But do you suppose, Mr. Stanford—"

- "You might say 'Gardner,' all things considered —"
- "I rather like 'Stan,'" suggested Jaconetta demurely.

To her surprise, the Cynic hesitated. He drummed rather restlessly on the back of the swing with the fingers of one sunburned hand.

- "Not that," he said uneasily, "if you don't mind. Make me a name of your own. I—I'd rather you didn't call me that."
- "I can call you Mr. Stanford," said Jaconetta coolly, "just as well as not."
 - "Amy!" he begged reproachfully.
- "I wouldn't have suggested it for the world if I'd known there was any reason —"
- "It is purely," said the Cynic with a slight effect of stubbornness, "a matter of association."
- "Un-unpleasant association?" asked Jaconetta hopefully.

The Cynic's voice hardened. "On the contrary."

- "Another girl?" said Jaconetta.
- "Dear," said the Cynic, "when I asked

you to marry me, I left off thinking of other girls — can't you?"

- "Another girl?"
- "What difference does it make now?"
- "Another girl?"
- "Exactly," said the Cynic. He folded his arms and leaned back in the swing. At the same moment, Jaconetta leaned forward, the corners of her mouth twitching faintly.
- "Suppose," she murmured, "I'd say to you, 'Don't call me "Amy"—if you don't mind—there's someone else who calls me that. Find me another name.' You'd be cross, wouldn't you?"

After all, he is a truthful Cynic and Jaconetta knows it.

- "Very likely," he admitted stiffly.
- "Men are so funny," sighed Jaconetta.
- "It's a small thing to ask," said the Cynic, with perhaps a shade of bitterness.
- "It's just the little things that get stuck in your heart—and hurt," said Jaconetta.

The swing moved to and fro, lazily, in a reluctant silence. Out of a cloudless, moon-

less sky the white stars blinked on the languid earth. The smell of the jasmine on the lawn drifted with the wind.

Jaconetta laid five butterfly fingers on the grey monk's sleeve.

"After all," she drawled sweetly, "as you say, it's a little thing to ask—it can't make a great deal of difference. Let me call you 'Stan."

The Cynic's hand closed crushingly on hers, but his voice was none the less determined.

- "My darling girl," he said, "I think I'd rather not."
- "Who calls you that?" demanded Jaconetta sharply. She wrenched her fingers free.
- "That doesn't matter, either," said Stanford.

Jaconetta flung up her head with a gesture of defiance.

"I wonder," she stormed, "if you think I'm going to care—after that. If you think that any girl with half an inch of pride—"

- "I'm sorry," he interrupted coolly, "perhaps it is asking too much to expect a woman to be reasonable."
- "Or a man to be unselfish," sniffed Jaconetta.
 - "That is as you please," said the Cynic.
- "I don't see how you dared —" she began coldly.
- "Suppose we say no more about it," suggested the Cynic. He stood up with one hand on the nearest chain.

Jaconetta, by way of answer, merely averted her head and gazed fixedly out across the lawn. When the sound of his footsteps had died away down the porch, she laughed. A little later she left the swing and went back by a circuitous pathway of unfrequented doors and windows to the ballroom.

There, later, the Cynic came to her, at the stroke of twelve, with the removal of the masks, and laid friendly hands upon her dance card.

"Where do I come in?" he demanded aggrievedly. "I've been hunting for you all

evening, Jack. Give me a waltz. Been having a good time?"

"Heavenly," said Jaconetta. Her cheeks were flushed, her dark eyes brilliant. When she smiled, a dimple flickered maddeningly in her left cheek.

- "You're looking pretty decent to-night," approved the Cynic; "give me the next."
 - "I've nothing left."
 - "You might have saved me one."
 - "You might have asked for it."

A slim little girl, blue-eyed, rose-lipped, the smile of conscious prettiness upon her somewhat infantile features, stopped before them unexpectedly. Jaconetta's wicked dimple deepened, to see the Cynic stiffen on the instant to a perceptible frigidity.

"Oh, Miss Lane!" cooed the slim little girl, every soft dark curl a-flutter, "how awfully charming you look! You ought to be Pierrette all the time. Oughtn't she, Mr. Stanford?"

Mr. Stanford did not commit himself. He replied evasively that all the time was a lengthy period. "A large order, as it were," Jaconetta supplied with a grimace.

"A large order?" repeated the slim little girl in a charming perplexity.

"That's frightful slang," explained impertinent Jaconetta. "It's permissible for me, but pretty people should lisp in numbers. Do you see how coldly Stan is looking at me? Presently I shall be kindly, but firmly, reproved — always, however, with my best interests at heart."

"I think you're so funny," said the slim little girl with an inane little giggle. "I love to hear you talk."

"My dear," returned Jaconetta gravely, applause is the breath of my nostrils."

"Isn't she just too funny and cute?" appealed the audience.

The Cynic set his teeth. Before Jaconetta's innocent satisfaction he stifled an unmannerly scowl. He persistently declined to meet the wide blue eyes so obviously lifted to his, and the rose-lipped mouth, in consequence, developed an uncomprehending droop at the corners. "I shan't forgive you for that eleventh waltz, Mr. Stanford," sighed the slim little girl over her shoulder as she drifted away.

Apropos of nothing that had lately gone before, the remark produced an amazing effect.

"Women," said the Cynic deliberately, are nine-tenths sheer, cold nerve."

"And one-tenth goose," said Jaconetta. "What was it? You forgot her dance?"

The Cynic's lower lip twisted. He shrugged angrily.

"Forget it?" he echoed. "We sat it out. Look here, Jack, be a good fellow! Shake the man you've got the next with. Come out and talk to me. I want to smoke."

"You are just plain, spoiled, selfish Boy," said Jaconetta severely. She drew a line through the next name on her card. "Where shall we go?"

They crossed the lawn, the Cynic leading, to a trellis of crimson rambler and a wide, gnarled rustic seat. "The sort that always sticks into you," commented Jaconetta frankly, "in sixty million different places — well?"

She arranged herself as comfortably as might be, while the Cynic fumbled for his cigarette case.

"Oh, well!" he said at last, "what's the use of talking? I'm pretty sore, that's all. Smoke bother you?"

"You know I like it," murmured Jaconetta.

He smoked for a little in silence. Before them the great lighted house and the feet of the dancers and the music made pleasing mockery of the night. Behind them, in the shadow of the park, a screech-owl sent out its long, shuddering cry. A little breeze went whispering along the grass. Jaconetta shivered.

- "Cold?" asked the Cynic instantly.
- "No," she denied, with a sigh.
- "Better let me get you a coat."
- "I'm not cold, Stan."

The screech-owl cried again.

"I hate that sound," said Jaconetta sud-

denly. "When I was a very little girl, the darkeys used to tell me it meant death—death in the house—if the owl came to your gate and called."

- "Rotten superstition," said the Cynic carelessly.
- "There was one that cried in a tree at the gate — the night my mother died," said Jaconetta. Her voice was slightly uneven.
- "My dear girl," said the Cynic, "you can't mean that you honestly believe —"
- "It stayed deep in my mind, I suppose. It only comes back to me when I am tired—or lonesome. Oh, I honestly believe very little. Don't worry! And don't let's talk about me. Why won't Amy Lang forgive you for the eleventh waltz?"

The Cynic looked back at the small, dark, impish face that was suddenly, even in that shadowy light, instinct with mischief.

"What a girl you are!" he said musingly.

"One minute, screech-owls and shivers and death — the next, Amy Lang and the

eleventh waltz. Why won't she forgive me? The nine gods only know. I asked her to marry me!"

"Why, it seems to me," said Jaconetta, "she might forgive you that. I dare say you didn't do it any too well, still—"

"Well enough to be acceptable."

"Dear me! dear me!" said Jaconetta, "then I am even now conversing with a happy man. How awfully nice! I congra—"

"Save yourself the trouble," objected the Cynic bluntly. "The engagement is broken."

Jaconetta surveyed him with a distinct mingling of pride and incredulity.

"At this rate," she commended, "you'll establish a record, won't you? Gracious, Stan! The pensive goat and sportive cow were nothing to you. They only leaped hilarious from bough to bough, while you go hurdling into and out of the most serious engagements — my dear boy!"

"I told you I was sore," reminded the Cynic. "When I want to be laughed at —"

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Jaconetta surrendered promptly.

"Bless its heart! It should be comforted and fussed over. Was it a cruel world? And did the wicked fair one turn it down?"

"For a couple of cents," he stated quietly, "I'd shake you till your teeth chattered."

"I left my purse at home," said Jaconetta regretfully. "I suppose you couldn't trust me?"

"I could not."

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"After all," she offered, with an effect of tardy consolation, "I dare say it isn't so bad as it sounds. Off again — on again — luck in odd numbers, you know. If you're good, you may be forgiven."

"I sincerely trust not," said the Cynic.
"I'm wiser now. I was caught by a pretty face and it jolly well serves me right."

Jaconetta looked at him reproachfully.

"I was fool enough to think," he went on with growing self-disgust, "that because it was pleasant to go around with her — she seemed such a soft, helpless little thing —" "The desire of the oak for the vine, eh?"

"A man likes to be believed in," affirmed the Cynic naïvely. He flung away the stump of his cigarette. "In any case, it was a ghastly mistake., I saw that, as soon as she did. We're both well out of it."

"I dare say."

The Cynic lit a fresh cigarette in a comforted silence, sensing vaguely oil and wine upon his wounds.

Presently he flung out a tentative suggestion.

"Suppose she had taken me — you wouldn't have cared a hang, Jack?"

"Was that your last conscious thought before asking her?"

"Oh, well!" he evaded, "I'm talking sense."

"If she had," said Jaconetta, "I should, by now, be seated upon the top of a lonely hill—only there isn't any hill around here—howling painfully at the moon—only there isn't any moon—eh, Stan?"

"You're a great little goose," said the Cynic. He added between smoke rings, "Just the same — there's nobody like you, Jack. I often wonder —"

"Go on, do!" said Jaconetta, "this seems familiar."

"Why you won't marry me yourself. We should be pretty comfy — shouldn't we?"

Jaconetta merely laughed.

"Sometimes—" said the Cynic. "You can laugh if you like—but, sometimes, I get so condemnably lonely—it's Hades in brief."

"You poor boy!" crooned Jaconetta. She put out her hand and drew it back. Her voice held an absolute ache of tenderness. Then the laughter welled up again.

"I should like to know," she demanded sternly, "if you intend to propose to me twice in one night?"

"What?" said the Cynic. "You—what are you talking about?"

He looked vaguely perplexed.

"The first one went like this," said Jaco-

netta. She leaned forward, one arm along the back of the rustic seat, as the Cynic had sat in the swing.

"'Do you remember that day in the she pleaded dramatically, "'when I measured the shadow your eyelashes cast on your cheek? I haven't forgotten that, nor the dance that night, nor the ride next morning, nor a day, nor a night of that whole, splendid week -- "

"Jack!" said the Cynic sharply, "what sort of a crazv -"

"' Mountain-top in my life," rehearsed Taconetta glibly. "'I like to think of it— I like to dream that perhaps, some day —'"

"It's absolutely impossible!"

"'There'll be another house-party," said Jaconetta sweetly, "'a house-party of two.' "

She came to a pause purely for lack of breath.

"She told you!" he accused angrily. "Well, of all the —"

"No, indeed!" Jaconetta's denial was vigorously prompt. "I know a lot more.

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Shall I go on? 'My dear, don't you care for me at all? You must have seen that I—'"

"Jack! This is just about the limit!"
"'You must have seen," persisted Jaconetta firmly, "'that I love you."

"Well—" said the Cynic slowly. "You unspeakable little wretch!" Jaconetta gave way to mirth. She rocked, in an ecstasy of elfish glee.

"Oh, Stan!" she sighed at last, "Oh, Stan! You'll be the death of me. Did you think you could propose with reservations? My dear, dear boy!"

"It was you," affirmed the Cynic stoically.

"Come to think of it," said Jaconetta, "I believe it was."

"You might have stopped me," he suggested.

"I hadn't the heart," said Jaconetta, "you were so pleased with your performance."

"And you -"

"Oh, I was frightfully interested. You

see, at first I thought you were proposing to me—then I couldn't tell whom you were proposing to—and then I had to keep you from finding out."

The Cynic's vanity, wounded in its tenderest part, defended itself with a sting. His voice deepened to regret.

"I've done Amy an injustice."

"And did it very badly, too," said Jaconetta, "but cheer up! Now you know the way, it will be simple. Find the divinity after this dance, bring her out here, rehearse the moving tale and avoid the rocks! Let her call you Jupiter — if she wants to. By the way, who calls you Stan — beside myself?"

"No one," said the Cynic bluntly.

"I thought so," murmured Jaconetta.

"Well, I won't be a skeleton at the feast.

I shan't in the least mind changing to
Gardner — or Mr. Stanford."

"It won't be necessary," he assured her.

"You grieve me. I had hoped that this little experience—"

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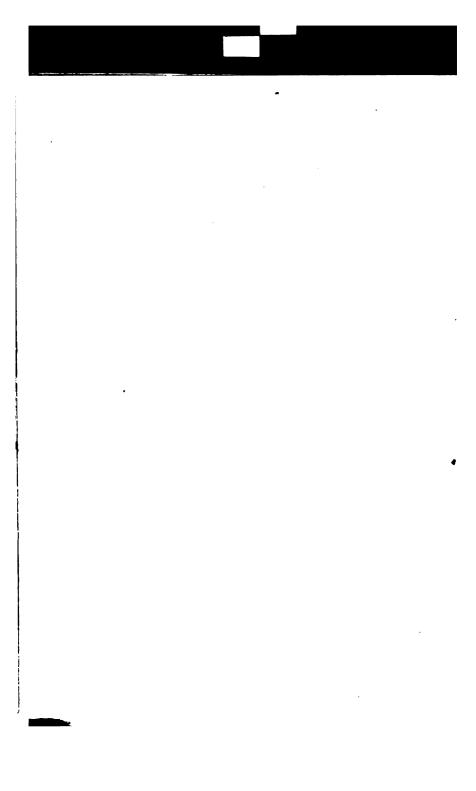
"Will be enough," said the Cynic. "Suppose we go back to the house."

Jaconetta followed meekly in his wake. At the foot of the steps they faced each other with a mutual impulse. The Cynic stretched out his hand, and Jaconetta, dimpling, yielded hers.

"After all, Jack—" He hung fire a trifle shamefaced.

"Oh, yes!" said Jaconetta demurely, "I dare say it's all for the best."

VII JACONETTA AND THE POEM



VII

JACONETTA AND THE POEM

To the most innocent of observers the fact betrayed itself in every shimmering fold and chiffony whisper. It was a gown of old-rose satin, cut squarely about her slender throat and falling in close, liquid lines to her small feet. Above it, her dark hair fluffed into an artfully simple arrangement and her eyes shone with a primitive joy. She walked up and down before the Cynic with a lingering, sliding step, designed to show off the wonderful little trail that followed in her wake.

"Well?" she demanded presently, "how do you like me?

The Cynic's verdict was disappointing, delivered in one trenchant word: "Peacock!"

"Eh!" said Jaconetta, stopping short in her parade and staring —" me?"

"Your English," he suggested, "is quaint, but you've caught my idea."

Jaconetta folded her arms above a garniture of embroidered chiffon and old-rose velvet, likewise a stormy heart.

"H'mph!" she remarked disdainfully, "is that all you've got to say about it?"

"Why, it's a good-looking dress, of course. But honestly, Jack, I like that black and white arrangement you wear better."

"It's completely out of style and in rags."

"It looks good to me," insisted the Cynic stubbornly, "and you're yourself in it. All your feminine conceit comes to the surface in this thing. It spoils any beauty the dress might otherwise have. You're too conscious of yourself—"

Jaconetta interrupted him flippantly, "In conclusion, dearly beloved, and before we close—"

- "Oh, all right," said the Cynic, "you asked me what I thought of you, that's all."
 - "I asked how you liked me."
- "That," he objected instantly, "is a grey horse of a totally different color, and —"
- "Is a matter of absolute indifference to me," Jaconetta completed airily; "we were discussing my gown."
- "A moment ago," he retorted somewhat perplexed, "it was —"
- "Oh, a moment ago!" cried Jaconetta hotly, "a year ago!—a century ago! What's the difference?"

She turned away from him with a swirl of old-rose draperies. There were angry tears in her eyes, which the Cynic had no way of knowing. He went on in his quick, casual speech.

"Not that you're an exceptionally vain young person. It's the heritage of your sex. Fine feathers and mirrors — you're born to 'em. It's the little savage in you that used to preen herself beside forest pools, arranging the feathers in her hair and the necklace of teeth around her throat. Man's gone a few rungs farther up the evolutionary ladder. Straight black and white is good enough for him—"

"Not to say red ties?"

The Cynic lifted conscious fingers to his ruddy four-in-hand. He knew his one sartorial weakness.

"Granted; still, that's one article of dress against a hundred. Furs, feathers, jewels, metal — Carlyle, you know, says woman is the walking rag-bag of creation."

"Carlyle," commented Jaconetta tersely, "was a rude old beast."

A significant silence overtook the conversation. The Cynic broke it, smiling pleasantly.

"Oh, I wouldn't be vindictive. I only said women were the exponents of vanity. You're so different from other women in most things, though—"

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Jaconetta.
"Listen! So you think women are conceited? Men aren't?"

"They are, of course," he admitted a bit

sententiously, "but to a far smaller extent."

Jaconetta stood a little while in reflective silence, then she awoke.

- "Um-humph," she agreed with a suspicious amiability, "wait here a minute."
- "Oh, I say!" he protested, but, with a whisper of skirts on the floor and up the stairs, Jaconetta was gone.

After five minutes or so she came back, smiling. There were three letters and a clipping in her left hand. She was a little out of breath.

- "What under the sun?" began the Cynic.
- "I wouldn't do it," said Jaconetta, "except that you force me to. It came to me like a flash."
- "I'm quite in the dark," he reminded her quizzically. "You won't be long," Jaconetta nodded her head at him sagely. "Come, sit over here until I open your eyes."

She sat down on the davenport, in the corner by the fireplace, and the Cynic followed obediently. Jaconetta settled her skirts with a deft movement or two and lifted an un-

conscious hand to her hair. She had the air of one about to ride into the lists.

"Now!" she said impressively, "Exhibit A. Do you recognize it?"

It was a poem cut from a magazine, and signed with Jaconetta's name. Jaconetta, if the truth must be told, occasionally writes verses; little things, strung chiefly on minor chords, that find their way somehow into print and match but ill with the author's cheerful grin and characteristic, flippant point of view.

- "Never saw it before that I know of," the Cynic admitted interestedly.
 - "Read it," commanded Jaconetta.
 - "Aloud?" he asked.
- "Oh, for pity's sake!" cried Jaconetta hastily, "no!"

The Cynic read it carefully to himself. It was rather long and it was called "The Woman":

Back, if you came to me, alone, to-night,
And drew my empty hands, within your own;
Saying, "I want you — I have missed the light
And am a-thirst for springs we two have known;"
Saying, "I weary of the world of men;"

Saying, "Dead love, arise, be quick, again!" And if you held me, waiting, with deep eyes -Back if you came to me, and cried my name, The name you made, wherein all magic lies. And potent wonder of sweet witcheries Upleaping at your voice as flame to flame, Sullen were I, and silent, if you came? Remembering all - the game, the stake, the loss; Remembering, dumb, the price of youth I paid; The cruel path which faith and unfaith cross, The havoc of my hopes your hand had made; Remembering, slow, the hurt your love had left; The weary days, of dream and sooth bereft, Nay, if you came, the rest were light forgot, And all forgot the wisdom I have learned: Joy I have fought to keep, long-time and hot, Peace I have snatched, and laurel-leaf, sad-earned -Toys were they all, to spill beneath your feet -Back if you came, and found the coming sweet!

"You want to know what I think of it?" asked the Cynic.

"Not at all," said Jaconetta coolly; "it was simply necessary for you to read it to understand the point of my remarks." She took back the poem and laid it aside upon a gorgeous cushion of silver and black.

"It came out," she explained, "about two weeks ago, in a magazine which shall be nameless."

The Cynic held out his hand with a somewhat indulgent gesture.

"Exhibit B?" he prompted.

Jaconetta took one of the letters from its envelope and handed it to him.

"Dear Jack," said the letter. "I have just been reading your poem in M--'s. I didn't think you had it in you — it went straight to the centre of my heart — and I'm carrying it over that heart now in my inside pocket. It brought back a lot of memories that have been safely stowed away for a long time - I tell you, you've been pretty constantly in my mind since I read it. I've wished over and over that we had those days back again; that I could once more get courage and inspiration from you, to play the Game, as I got it in those summer evenings, ages ago - for it seems ages, little woman, when I measure time by the changes I see in myself ---"

Jaconetta sniffed and chuckled.

"It's all the same thing," she explained, "you needn't bother to read the rest of it.

He merely goes on to remark that he knows I am interested — I always was — and to explain wherein he differs from most men to their disadvantage. She pointed to a line on the last page with a slim brown finger. "Most men are content to win, whatever the way — with me it was always clean hands, or empty."

"Good Heavens!" said the Cynic disgustedly.

Jaconetta smiled to herself. "Don't read the name at the end," she warned. "You know him. Here, give it to me."

"Well," the Cynic offered slowly, "that's, of course, a sporadic case. Exceptions, you know — I hate to quote proverbs at you."

"You'd better wait," suggested Jaconetta. "Here's Exhibit C. I'll fold the name down, so you won't feel that you're invading the privacy of my correspondence too dreadfully. This one is short, but saccharine. Am I boring you?"

"I don't like reading other men's letters," he remarked.

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"I reckon it's my letter," reminded Jaconetta. "I say you can read it."

The Cynic read it, after settling his eyeglasses:

" Cara mia:

"You are wonderful. It's the frankest, sweetest, tenderest thing I ever read. It brought an ache to my throat, honestly. It reminded me of so much I thought we had forgotten. You haven't, then? Dear, warm little heart that I never was worthy to waken! But I did. I was the first, Jaconetta. You can't get back of that. I get a lot of happiness out of realising it. Oh, well—if we could only begin where we left off—if you could ever begin where you leave off. But you can't. It's a deuce of a world. I just wanted to tell you that I've cut out the poem and put it away, with a rose—it's a rose you'd remember—"

"That's about all of that," said Jaconetta, taking the letter away from the Cynic. "Humorous, eh?"

"I don't know," retorted the Cynic coolly, "that I should call it that. Seems to me you've rather a slushy set of egotists in your acquaintance. Of course, there are a few men of that type. They wear flowing black ties, generally, and —"

"I've heard you say," Jaconetta broke in firmly, "that both these men were a good sort. It's a matter of different soul-sides, à la Browning. They show you one, and me the other. Here's the last. I'll read it to you myself. Only a little of it refers to this. Let's see—"

She read slowly, her dimple deepening to a smile of delicate malice:

"'If you'— H'm—'last night'— no, here it is! 'I've seen the poem. If I thought you meant it, Jaconetta—but I'd only be riding for a fall, again. You're incapable of any really deep feeling. Some women are, I suppose. You're just a Sentimental Tommy in petticoats. Dear little Tommy! Anyhow, it gives me rather a glow to think you're lonesome occasionally. That evens us up a bit. Well—'"

"So," said Jaconetta in conclusion, "you see? There are three of them, and there was a fourth who sent me word that he was carrying the poem around in his pocket-book." She added with a reminiscent, flick-

ering smile, "I sent him word that three other men were doing the same thing. Are you laughing?"

The Cynic shook his head. "Far be it from me! I was merely turning over in my own mind—" He hesitated so long that Jaconetta said "Yes?" to hurry him. "Turning over in my own mind the fact that in your rainbow past each of these fellows must, some time, have been rather conspicuous—eh? How many of them were you ever engaged to?"

"Three," said Jaconetta promptly, then bit her lip and considered; "say three and a half, to be exact."

"My dear girl!" Stanford objected amusedly, "three and a half. You talk like a vivisectionist."

"Three and a half," she persisted. "One was a purely pen-and-ink engagement. I broke it when he started to come South. See," she shuffled the letters like playing-cards, "this is die Erste Liebe, this is the One Love of My Life and this is a Platonic Misunderstanding."

"'My Grandmother,'" he quoted gravely, "'told me to take six —'"

"Anyhow," Jaconetta allowed him the satisfaction of a somewhat shamefaced hesitation on her part, "they had no reason to suppose — no reason, that is, except an overweening, enormous, incredible, perfectly ghastly, masculine conceit!"

"That's strong language," protested the Cynic.

"Well," said Jaconetta defiantly, "had they?"

She clasped both hands about one knee, rumpling the old-rose gown quite carelessly, and looked off across the room into a cloud of memories.

"You'll notice," she explained, "that every single one of them is beautifully tactful. Each one remembers things, each one is sorry for me and appreciates my little tribute to his powers of fascination, but each one neglects to offer himself in consolation—that's what kills me. My four-timeswidowed heart must go on aching alone. Isn't it awful?"

- "You're a little wretch," said the Cynic suddenly. "You're laughing in your sleeve at 'em all."
 - "Why shouldn't I?"
- "Oh, I don't know," mused Stanford. "It's always just possible that somebody's in earnest. Likewise, it's always just possible that somebody's been hurt. The chap with 'the rose you'd remember,' now - well, he protests too much. He's probably a temperamental suitor, with a girl in every corner of the earth. The one who doesn't know why he's made of so much finer stuff than the rest of us - who measures time by the changes he sees in himself — is too selfcentred, I take it, to get very much of a jolt from anything less than an earthquake. But the last one — the one who called you a Tommy in petticoats — he sounds real, to me. I'll bet you left a scar."
 - "He's engaged."
- "Oh, well," the Cynic retorted deprecatingly, "you can't expect to establish an order of celibates among your Dead Pasts."

"And he says I'm incapable of any really deep feeling."

The Cynic shrugged and grinned.

"Say it aloud," said Jaconetta. "Isn't it funny, Stan? Whenever a man fails to arouse any tender emotion in a woman, it's always because she's incapable of feeling it; never, by any chance, because he isn't a good arouser."

She flung the three letters impatiently aside. "Oh, sometimes I get so tired of the whole thing! I get so tired of hearing that I'm flippant, and cold, and shallow, and amusing, when all the time, down in my heart, I'm just lonesome—that's all—just deadly, dully lonesome."

The Cynic put his hand over hers with a protecting warmth.

"Poor little kid!" he said softly. "Aren't you happy?"

Jaconetta let her hand lie. She rested her chin in the palm of the other and stared fiercely ahead.

"If I were, do you suppose I'd get mixed up in all the crazy scrapes I do? If I

weren't restless and dissatisfied and bored, don't you suppose I'd behave?"

"No, I don't," said the Cynic promptly.

Jaconetta smiled wistfully. Then the
smile grew to a laugh. She took away her
hand.

"Well, as a matter of fact," she admitted quite cheerfully, "I wouldn't.".

"Of course not," said the Cynic.

"To come back around the bush," she suggested demurely, "have I proved to your satisfaction that men are subject to a vanity which makes our poor feminine article look sick and pale in comparison?"

Stanford moved nearer and laid his arm along the top of the sofa.

"What's the difference?" he asked coolly. "The thing I don't like about your documentary evidence is that each one of those confounded duffers thinks you're eating your heart out on his account."

"I'm simply polite," murmured Jaconetta, "and they misunderstand me."

The Cynic laughed shortly. "I don't think you're altogether blameless," he ad-

mitted, and fell into silence, looking at Taconetta. The moment was growing awkward, when the telephone on the table rang out sharply. Jaconetta answered its imperious summons quickly, with somewhat of relief.

"Hello?" she drawled. I haven't the faintest idea." "Perhaps you'd better tell me." "Why, Don! It's you, really? Really? I'm awfully glad - I didn't know you were in town." . . . "To-morrow night? Oh, it's too bad — I've an engagement the night after? Yes, do."

Stanford, watching idly, saw her face change and glow with an impish amusement.

"Oh, you did? Yes, in M——'s — I'm glad you liked it, Don." . . . yes, of course, I must have meant something -I don't have to add footnotes, do I?" "The prisoner isn't required to incriminate herself.". " Do know, I think that's frightfully conceited of you?" . . . "No! You're not really? In your inside pocket? Why, Don! I'm terribly flattered." . . . "Yes, indeed,

I'm dying to talk over old times. How long has it been — ten months? No, indeed, I haven't forgotten." . . . "Oh, that! Why, I suppose all poetry is personal — more or less — isn't it? Thursday, then? Good-bye."

She hooked up the receiver and turned back in a little gust of laughter, but the Cynic stopped her delighted explanation.

"Wait," he commanded, "don't say a word! I admit all you say about masculine conceit, but who's responsible for it? Why did you let that fellow, just now, think you were flattered to death by his lugging the verses around? He was talking about the verses?"

"That's the fifth," said Jaconetta. Her voice was unsteady with laughter.

The Cynic laughed. He got to his feet and walked over to the table.

"After all, Jack," he said lightly, "what's in the game when it's done? Ashes and dead sea fruit!"

A queer, frightened look came into Jaconetta's eyes. She had come to stand by the

table herself and rested both hands on its dully polished top.

"It isn't finished yet — for me," she answered almost defiantly, "and one has to be amused, somehow."

"Are you sincere?" he asked, looking at her very gravely.

Jaconetta mocked him with a demurely twisted smile. "That's a song or something, isn't it? No, I'm not. It's my experience that the people you're sincere with are the ones that hurt you. The others don't get near enough."

"You don't mean a word of that," said the Cynic.

"That nor anything else," Jaconetta agreed amiably.

They both laughed. Stanford covered it with a frown. "I'd rather like to know," he said thoughtfully, "whom it was you did write those verses to? There must be someone."

"And it might as well be you?"

Out of a meditative silence he shook his head at her, decisively. "Don't be greedy!

Aren't five enough for you? No. I'd merely like to know. I'm curious."

She surrendered her left hand to the Cynic's friendly hand-shake with the smile of a small, sad-eyed sphinx, but before their fingers slipped apart she had begun to laugh deliciously.

- "You'd really like to know?"
- "If I thought you'd tell me the truth," he conceded, "but I don't."
- "Why, then I will," said Jaconetta. She stifled her mirth with difficulty. "You aren't conceited at all—are you? I wrote them for you."
- "I dare say," he said somewhat offended. The Cynic has no love for being laughed at. He added coldly, "I was talking sense."

Three quarters of an hour later, in his own room, he switched on the light above a familiar clipping which he read through twice. The second time he frowned and shrugged, then smiled — indulgently. Finally he refolded the poem and bestowed it, with an air of businesslike abstraction, in his upper left-hand vest pocket.

VIII JACONETTA AND THE CONQUEROR

VIII

JACONETTA AND THE CONQUEROR

NCE upon a time there was a man who asked Jaconetta to marry him—he had both predecessors and successors, we may as well admit—and Jaconetta refused for two reasons. First, she said, he did not love her enough—this, being truthful, he could not convincingly contradict. Second, she said, and here was a truly Jaconettian point of view, she loved him too much.

"How do I know," she explained to him wistfully, "that you don't care enough? Because I do."

And the man shrugged and smiled — the thing he did best.

"Then if you don't want to marry me," he suggested, flippant to shelter the hurt to his pride, "will you go to the theatre — Wednesday evening?"

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Jaconetta went. She reasoned, not unwisely, that it is at best a small world, and soon sucked dry. She made no hopeless exactions, therefore, and gathered ye rosebuds while she might, only refusing steadfastly, at increasing intervals, to exchange a large love for a lesser one.

If she suffered in the process, her dimple served her as a mask, and she had a trick of easy laughter. The man, at least, believed her heartless, shallow even, as a man is apt to find a woman who is not at once overwhelmed by his tribute. She told him of other men, and he listened indulgently. He told her of himself, and her eyes deepened; her cheeks warmed to the lure of the theme—it will be seen that they were friends, in the happiest sense of the word.

But man is fire and woman is tow, and friendship may serve as a wind to carry the sparks.

There came a time when the Cynic accepted the situation no longer peaceably, and precipitated a crisis.

"You will," he told her trenchantly, "or

you won't. Take me, or leave me, Jack. We are wasting time on this platonic game. You say I don't care, according to your ideals. Good enough! I'm lonely. I want to marry. I want a home. I care more for you than for any other woman in the world; but if you don't want to marry me—there are others."

Jaconetta's accustomed weapon of mockery leaped into play at once.

"I haven't the remotest doubt," she agreed calmly, "that a mob of heart-hungry females awaits your ultimate decision — still, wouldn't it show a more pleasing modesty on your part, if you refrained from referring to them?"

"You will?" said the Cynic again, unsmiling, "or you won't?"

"H'mph!" said Jaconetta. "Have to make up my mind right now?"

"Right now," said the Cynic.

Jaconetta frowned. Then she chuckled. "Flip a coin," she commanded.

The Cynic looked at her with disapproval. His cool grey eyes grew narrow.

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"Be a sport!" urged Jaconetta in the accent and vernacular she knew he most disliked — and the Cynic smiled. He flipped a coin; Jaconetta pronounced before it fell:

"Heads, I will; tails, I won't."

Then she held her breath, with a pulse beating madly in her throat.

"Heads it is!" said the Cynic. He picked up the coin, put it back in his pocket, and looked at Jaconetta.

To the choking pulse in Jaconétta's throat was added a tiny hammer in either temple, and a creeping chill at the fingertips, but she met his eyes squarely.

"Very well," she said, "it stands."

"Jack," said the Cynic quite husky, all at once, "you mean it?"

"Are you trying," asked Jaconetta, "to jilt me?"

Then someone came out on the veranda beside them, and the talk was of ships and shoes and sealing-wax, which may serve as well as the weather to signify extraneous matter and polite torture.

It was the night of the midsummer dance

at the Westerfield Country Club, and a great heat hung upon the earth. The Club sat upon a hill, and spilled radiance into the breathless darkness. At the foot of the hill lay a valley, where mist hung fold on fold, pricked through with scattered lights; beyond this mist, in a vast purple greyness, a cloudbank, and out of the cloud-bank, rising sullenly crimson, the moon.

The musicians, with a telepathic sense of the fitness of things, played "Any Little Girl That's a Nice Little Girl Is the Right Little Girl for Me," and someone came and asked Jaconetta to dance.

She went, her rose and blue skirts shaking out an evanescent fragrance.

It was two hours later before the Cynic made his way through her careful barriers, and asserted a claim.

To get to Jaconetta, he thrust politely between two suitors who were disputing each other's right to the next waltz.

"Mine, I think?" remarked the Cynic, and the suitors stared. Jaconetta looked demure; she played with the Maryland roses

at her waist, and assumed a delicate abstraction.

"Oh, come, Stan!" objected the younger suitor — he was a sun-burned youth who had won that afternoon in the tennis finals and wore in consequence an air of mild invincibility — "you're in wrong. Miss Lane promised this to me a good half-hour ago."

The Cynic shrugged. "Did you?" he said to Jaconetta.

Jaconetta flushed. Unwillingly she lifted her big sad eyes to the Cynic's face; her smile flickered uncertainly. Then she threw the younger suitor a radiant look.

- "I'm sorry."
- "Oh sorry!" observed the younger suitor with an immense disdain. He wagged an incredulous head.
 - "It was stupid of me," begged Jaconetta.
- "Very clever, I call it," said the younger suitor audaciously.

He moved off, still shaking his head and sighing heavily. The other, less demonstrative, turned stiffly in another direction, making quickly for the nearest girl.



"'Now see what you've done,' said Jaconetta gaily."

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ASTOR, LENOY AND TILDEN FOUNDATIONS "Now see what you've done!" said Jaconetta gaily.

"Come out on the links," suggested the Cynic quietly. "It's stifling in here."

Jaconetta paused in the doorway. "As a matter of fact, it was his dance."

"Make any difference?" inquired the Cynic.

They went down the steps of the clubhouse, and across the driveway to the links, where ghost-like in the windless gloom, dim figures wandered beneath the apple-trees.

"Like goblins in the dark," said Jaconetta suddenly, with a little laugh. She started when the Cynic slipped his hand beneath her arm, turning her to the right and the dim-rising crest of the hill.

"There's a stone," he explained, "at the top, where you can sit down! Goblins? Who? These people walking on the links here? More like dreams, aren't they? or memories. Just the whisper of a woman's skirt—a man's voice—a sort of perfume that's gone before you're even sure it passed you—"

"I meant the apple-trees," said Jaconetta softly. "They're all bent and hunched and shadowy, like goblins stealing up the hill, away from the moon."

The Cynic held her arm more closely. "Funny little girl, you are!" he mused.

"And funny man!" said Jaconetta.
"You and your memories; I and my goblins: who's the funniest? Let's turn back, Stan.
There's the music."

A queer, slow linking of chords crept out to them from the lighted club-house.

"We haven't come to the stone yet," said the Cynic. He added after a moment, "You don't want to dance: too hot."

Jaconetta hesitated — and went on. She held her pretty skirts away from the dry, short grass and stepped carefully. Twice they passed other couples sauntering lazily downward. Once a girl's voice called, like a bird note:

"Jaconetta? Is it Jaconetta? You should see the moon from the top of the hill—" then with a gurgle of laughter in between—" on such a night as this!"

"But so warm!" said Jaconetta in languid answer.

"Much too warm for indoors," said the Cynic.

They came, presently, to the stone, on the hilltop — a wide, flat thing in the dark — beneath the branches of an apple-tree. It was a grim, gnarled apple-tree, stoop-shouldered and still. No breeze whispered in its leaves.

"Here!" said the Cynic briefly, and lifted Jaconetta to a seat upon the stone. On the side of the valley — she faced it with a little gasp of wonder — the hill sloped down abruptly. At its foot lay the mists and the scattered lights, and the moon stared dead, smoke-sullied crimson from the edge of a rifting web.

Into the hot stillness of the night the music from the club-house sifted slowly — a recurrent throbbing that bore the message of the East. It had the beat of tom-toms and the wailing of pipes; a sensuous, monotonous appeal informed its sweetness.

"What is it?" asked the Cynic slowly.

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"Salome — the waltz from it," said Jaconetta.

After a long, listening moment the Cynic laid his hand over hers. He stood beside the stone and leaned to look into her face.

"Well!" he said abruptly; "well, Jack?"

A little shiver that took Jaconetta by the throat raced ecstatic to heel and back again. Notwithstanding which, she smiled at the moon and capped the possessive hand with her free one.

- "Well!" she echoed elfishly; "well, Stan!"
- "So you're going to marry me," said the Cynic; "I always thought you would, Jack."
- "Did you, now?" inquired Jaconetta with interest. "Because you knew I couldn't resist you?"

The Cynic crushed her imprisoned fingers with an appreciative strength.

- "Once," he said. "I told you that it's my belief a man will get what he wants — if only he wants it hard enough."
 - "Hard enough," said Jaconetta; "yes ---

'if only he wants it hard enough.' I dare say you're right, Stan."

Her voice carried an arresting note of hesitancy. When the Cynic leaned nearer yet, she put him away with a swift little gesture of denial.

"Wait!" she cried breathlessly.

The Cynic smiled a more or less tender indulgence. Being victor, he could afford to humour the spoils.

"Do you remember," said Jaconetta, cooler now, "the first time you asked me to marry you? One night at the beach — there was a squall —"

"Of course, I remember," he assented. "You said you wouldn't because I didn't care enough — and you cared too much — well, you've said now that you will." The hand on hers tightened again, significantly. "Why, Jack? Tell me why!"

Jaconetta's chin lifted, her eyes widened.

"Because," she said calmly, "I find I don't care as much as I did, and I've come to have your point of view. After all, it isn't a storm or a flame one wants; it's a sunny

day and a nice steady even fire. I'm not at all mad about you as I used to think, but I'm lonely. I want to marry; I want a home, just as you said, and I like you better than any man I know, Stan — that's all."

"I see," said the Cynic. It did not surprise Jaconetta that he presently took his hand away and put it in his pocket. But when he had done this, a smile twitched her lips. She sat very contentedly on the big stone, looking down into the valley, and humming a little song. If the waltz from Salome, that drifted across the links beneath the apple-trees, touched her with any goad of restlessness, or if the big, red moon had any magic to move her, she made no sign.

"It's good, isn't it?" she said at last, friendly-wise, "to see it alike. After all, Stan, we're pals. You can't get anything bigger than that. We're outside the mere bubble and squeak of emotion, eh? There's something fine and cool and comforting in this. I don't expect any sentimentality of you; you don't expect it of me. You're the nicest man I know; I'm the nicest

girl (I gather) that you know. Well, we think we'll be comfy together. That's all—no moonshine. It's good, isn't it?"

The Cynic made no immediate reply. Instead, he fumbled for a cigarette.

- "Mind if I smoke?" he suggested, having found it.
- "When we are married," said Jaconetta (and how was he to know that the blithe words halted her heart a beat?), "I shall smoke, myself."
 - "No you won't!" said the Cynic.
- "My dear boy!" objected Jaconetta properly superior.

The Cynic flicked the first ash.

- "About this this comradely attitude," he observed, "to go back a bit; something new, isn't it? You've never struck me, Jack, as a girl who could be trusted to inspire nothing but impersonalities. Been quite a few fellows, haven't there, who couldn't keep to platonics with you?"
- "I know," said Jaconetta repentantly, "I've been frightfully silly in my time. I suppose, really, there are just two kinds of

women - the kind you make love to, and the kind you don't." She added lucidly, "And, perhaps, I'm not the kind you don't. Still —"

"Yes?" said the Cynic curtly.

"You never made love to me," she continued. "That's one thing I shall always be glad of. There were men who did lots of 'em. I've told you about them, mostly. They're nice memories. But you never did, and I'm glad of it."

"Why?" said the Cynic.

Jaconetta was very serious. "Because I like you to be cool," she explained, "and indifferent, and detached. Just a sublimated sort of friend. It's the way I feel, myself."

"Oh!" said the Cynic.

"Aren't you well?" asked Jaconetta suddenly. She looked up at him with an anxious concern.

"Why?" said the Cynic.

"You're not talking much," said Jaconetta.

"I'm going to talk," he averred grimly,

"later on. We'll straighten this out first. You used to say you cared too much —"

"Oh, that doesn't last," said Jaconetta.

"Perhaps, if you had been just as silly as I—who knows? But you weren't. I shall always be glad of that, Stan. You weren't; and I've come, myself, to see it your way. I've got beyond the emotionalism and the sentimentality, to a place where I feel at home with you—just that, just as you said you felt—remember? That evening at the beach?"

"I remember," said the Cynic.

Jaconetta drew a rose from the crushed sweet cluster at her waist, and brushed it across her lips. The scent of it rose to Stanford's nostrils, and he flung away his cigarette.

"Go on," he suggested restrainedly.

"You see, don't you?" said Jaconetta dreamily. "It's all just as you described it to me. The fire and the moonshine, and all that, is just a phase of youth. I've felt it—and it's gone, and I'm glad. Now, there's just a pleasant satisfaction in know-

ing that you like me, and I like you. We're suited to each other, but we're not silly about it."

With an audacious impulse she smiled into his inscrutable face.

"Why, your hand on mine doesn't give me a thrill, even! It's just the hand of a friend, and I like to have it there."

"Oh," said the Cynic, "just the hand of a friend." He opened and shut the member in question reflectively, standing with one foot on the rock, his elbow on his knee. "Not the hand of a lover, by any chance?"

Jaconetta laughed deliciously. "It's a nice, strong, steady, comfortable hand, but no thrills, Stan. You were right. It isn't the thrills that matter; they don't last. This does."

- "This, meaning -"
- "Liking," said Jaconetta, "and congeniality." She arrayed the words in music, her small, dark face lifted to the moon with an inspired aloofness.
- "Humph!" said the Cynic an eloquent monosyllable.

There ensued at some length a silence, in which Jaconetta played with the rose.

"I've always thought," she said at last, biting a petal daintily, "that I should marry you, some day—some day, when the sentimental and emotional party was over."

The Cynic clipped his words rather carefully. His ugly, clever face was averted. He spoke seemingly to the mists in the valley. "I thought it was a common superstition that, with the wedding, the party began, eh? And they both lived happily ever after—the old fairy tale."

He was not looking at Jaconetta, and he did not see that Jaconetta's small, left hand, for one restless, yearning moment, hovered near his own. When he turned both hands were quiet in her lap.

"Ah, the old fairy tales!" said Jaconetta, with a little laughing break in her voice. "The old dreams and the old delusions! All we used to believe in—and don't! All we used to hope for—and forget! All we'd give our souls for—and throw away! It's too pitiful, Stan. Let's

let sleeping dogs lie quiet in their kennels, with a bone and a bowl of water to quiet them in case they wake. I don't want to hear them bark — do you? I don't want to open the old fairy tales; it's no use, once you've come to the years of discretion. There isn't any knight; there isn't any princess; there isn't any deathless love: there's just you, and me —"

- "And friendship!" supplied the Cynic. He invested the innocent word with a world of contempt.
- "And friendship," said Jaconetta blithely.

 "A very good thing it is, too. Let's go back to the Club."
- "I want to talk to you," said the Cynic moodily. He made no move toward departure, but Jaconetta slipped down from the stone and stood beside him with an impersonal nearness.
- "Well, you see," she observed, "that's one of the very nice things about an engagement like ours a higher-thought engagement, as it were. The things you want to say to me

will never be silly; they'll be just the things that anyone might hear."

"I'll be damned if they will," said the Cynic savagely.

"Oh, dear me!" said Jaconetta. She shook her head at him with reproachful disapproval.

"Jack!" said the Cynic so suddenly that Jaconetta started.

"Yes, Stan," she said amiably,—

"Do you love me?" asked the Cynic.

There was a tone in his voice that Jaconetta had never heard there before—a strained, unguarded aching tone, that other men had taught her to know, but no other man had taught her to answer.

She did not answer it now, although her fingers, clenching hard against the desire to do so, tortured the rose and dropped it, a shimmer of torn petals in the grass at her feet.

"Why, I'm fond of you, Stan," said Jaconetta sweetly.

For what happened next she was not quite prepared, although she must have known she played a daring game.

The Cynic put both arms around her and held her close. He put his lips to her hair, where it waved softly above her ear.

"Keep your liking — and congeniality — and fondness, Jack,— I love you." That last phrase broke hoarsely, and he said it again — then was silent.

Jaconetta stood very still; she held her breath, teeth on her quivering lip, as you might if the heavens opened suddenly before you, and a great shining angel looked down to ask you in. It had been a long time since she first knew what the Cynic meant to her, and she had played for high stakes. You cannot blame her if she doubted her ears, therefore, and shut her eyes in an exquisite agony of incredulity.

In the midst of all which the Cynic released her.

"I'm sorry," he said, "that you've changed. I had you—and lost you!

Heaven knows I was an honest ass; I never understood myself till now."

And Jaconetta, who had so cleverly helped him to an understanding of himself, walked beside him down the hill without a word. What was there to be said that she could say? For once, Jaconetta had fumbled badly, and she was about to pay for it. She held her rose-and-blue chiffons away from the parched, dry grass and stumbled a little over a hillock. When the Cynic touched her arm to steady her, she pulled herself together.

"I'm all right," she said easily, "it's these slippers."

"You've got no business with those heels," said the Cynic, as he had said it so many times before; but the admonition was dispirited, as if he felt the pretty foolish heels upon his heart.

After several hours, in which Jaconetta danced, and the Cynic watched her, the party made an end, and it was time to go home.

Frivolous matrons, athletic Dianas and fluffy sirens foregathered in the dressing-room. Rice-powder hung upon the air, and the neat maid staggered under multitudinous scarfs and coats.

Jaconetta covered her opalescent tissues with a demure, black cloak, and drew a chiffon hood over her pretty hair. Then she went back into the hall and looked about for Stanford.

He came to her from a knot of men in the doorway; his eyes sombre upon her carefully governed face, a perfunctory question on his lips.

"Ready? Do we go into town with the Gayles?"

"Yes," said Jaconetta, no less perfunctorily; "has the motor come round yet?"

"I'll see," said the Cynic. "All ready?"

"Quite ready," said Jaconetta. She nodded careless good-byes to people on the steps and started across the driveway, with her head high, to Mrs. Gayle, who waited upon the farther side. The Cynic, stopped

by a delicate hand on his coat-sleeve, a flirtatious and reproachful murmur in his ear, was somewhat behind her.

He did not notice, any more than Jaconetta herself, the horses, that moment rounding the drive, into whose way she walked, apparently with all deliberation; but he heard Mrs. Gayle's shrill scream, and, when the horses reared back upon their haunches, dragged by a frantic rein, he saw Jaconetta.

She was down in the dust of the road, a small, dark, nerveless heap, and upon her face, from which the chiffon hood fell back, the moon shone whitely, as upon the face of a dead girl; also there was a widening dark smear upon one cheek.

The Cynic reached her first. Out of all the babble of horror and explanation, he stood cool, holding the limp little figure, jealously close, until he laid her on the great leather lounge in the hall, and young Doctor Martin took command. Even then the Cynic retired no farther than the foot of the lounge, where he stood grave and silent in the ensuing turmoil.

They brought warm water in basins and cold water in glasses, other things in glasses, too, which the doctor forced between Jaconetta's teeth and tried to make her swallow. The warm water came clear and limpid and went away ruddy.

"Not a deep cut," said young Doctor Martin, with feeling. (He had danced "Home, Sweet Home" with Jaconetta not an hour before, and these things leave their mark.) "She's been stunned; it's just a scratch, up under the hair. Give me that sponge again — here!"

At which point, Jaconetta sighed deeply and opened her eyes.

"Where's Stan?" said Jaconetta.

The Cynic came around from the foot of the lounge and dropped to one knee beside young Doctor Martin. His voice shook a little.

"It's all right," he said quietly. "I'm here, Jack."

Jaconetta put her hand to her face.

"Humph!" she murmured. "Thought I was dead!" Which was not unlike Jaco-

netta. Then she took the hand down and looked at it curiously; it was touched with blood.

"Ugh!" she said, "lend me your handkerchief, Stan," which again was Jaconettian, purely.

Young Doctor Martin supplemented the handkerchief with a sponge and more warm water.

- "You've had a little accident," he explained soothingly. "There's a scratch up under your hair here—"
- "I—thought—it was a gaping—wound—"said Jaconetta.
- "Poor darling!" sobbed Mrs. Gayle suddenly, from out of the clustered bystanders.
- "Oh, no—" began the doctor tenderly, but Jaconetta sat upright on the lounge in the midst of his assurances.
- "I'm all right," she said pluckily. "I remember it was the horses. Let me get up, please."
- "Can you walk to the machine?" asked the Cynic.

He had not spoken much, but his eyes had not left the small pale face an instant, and his mouth set itself grimly.

"I don't think she's hurt at all," said young Doctor Martin in an earnest aside. "A bruise or two, maybe; that cut's nothing to speak of. The court-plaster'll do for that till she gets home. But wrap her up well, Stanford. You're going in with the Gayles?"

The Cynic nodded.

"Lucky escape!" said young Doctor Martin. "My word! If those horses had come an inch closer!"

Safe in the tonneau of the great French car, the hood once more upon her hair, the black cloak fastened close, a rug about her knees, Jaconetta offered a feeble protest.

"I'll roast, Stan."

"I'm taking care of you," said the Cynic.

Mrs. Gayle, muffled in many veils, was bestowed in front, beside her husband. She desisted from condoling with Jaconetta only when the car shot forward along the drive, rendering speech an exertion. At the last moment, young Doctor Martin's boyish face showed in the light alongside.

"I'll be round in the morning, Miss Lane."

"Why?" asked Jaconetta languidly. "I'm all right."

The Cynic did not speak. He tucked the rug closer about her knees, and fastened the topmost hook of her cloak. Jaconetta leaned back on the cushions.

"Thank you," she said; "I'm very comfy."

The car slipped down a great, white ribbon of road, between trees that were dappled with moonlight; for the moon, with its rising, had lost that first, dry, reddish flush, and now hung silver in mid-heaven. With the swift motion of the big machine came a wind that cooled the cheeks and beat upon the eyelids. It was a fresh wind and whispered of the water.

"How in heaven's name did you do it?" asked the Cynic all at once, and Jaconetta stirred, linking her hands together in her lap.

"I didn't notice the horses — that's all; I suppose they barely touched me — stunned me — wasn't that it?"

"I wouldn't go through it again —" said the Cynic, and drew a deep breath.

The car jolted over a rut in the road, and Jaconetta's slight figure swayed dizzily.

"Here!" said the Cynic sharply but low, and slipped his arm around her. When she held herself away from him, he laughed bitterly. "We're still engaged — eh? Unless you've thrown me over."

Jaconetta relaxed against his shoulder. Her head throbbed painfully, and her body was very tired, but the dimple flickered for a moment and deepened in a pitiful little smile.

"Not so very long ago," reminded the Cynic, "you said you'd marry me — does that hold?"

"It holds," said Jaconetta a trifle unsteadily, "unless you wish to be released."

"When I do," said the Cynic brusquely, "I'll let you know."

He added huskily, after two miles of

silence that passed, for Jaconetta, in an unreal and pain-shot dream, feeling the rough weave of his dust-coat beneath her cheek, his arm about her shoulders:

"If you only cared, Jack — as I care!"

Whereas, not unreasonably, Jaconetta laughed. It began in a breathless whisper and grew, almost soundless as it was, until it shook her like a reed. She shivered and swayed within the Cynic's arm, catching her breath in small sobbing noises, till finally she hid her face in her two shaking hands, and the tears slipped down between her fingers.

To all of which the respectable backs of Mr. Gayle and his spouse offered an unconscious audience.

The Cynic tightened his arm, which was as good as anything he could have done, under the circumstances, and waited. The engines purred, and the car slid forward smoothly into a stretch of enchanted forest.

At last Jaconetta stopped crying. She stilled herself wrenchingly, and let the wind dry her eyes. Only once or twice a shudder

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went over her as over the poppies when the breeze passes.

"Stan," she said, "if I tell you the truth, will you go on caring? If I let you see how much I care, you won't get tired and stop? I'm afraid, Stan — men are like that — and I'm afraid! Will you ever, ever —"

It was an enchanted forest, and just here the knight kissed the princess. She did not turn her face away when he stooped to it; she only smiled in the dark, but her lips trembled.

"I'm afraid!" she said — but she let him kiss her again.

For women are like that, too.

THE END

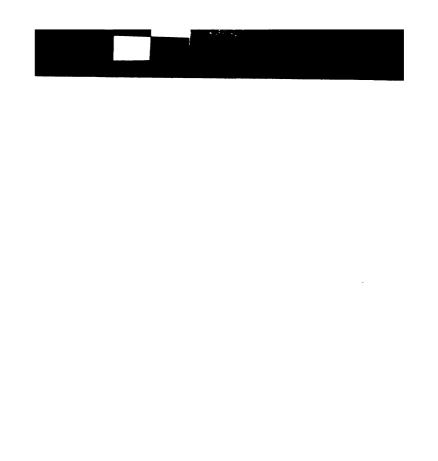
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